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SAFE AREAS IN BOSNIA: THEIR IMPACT ON THE UN PEACEKEEPING  
OPERATION AND THE BOSNIAN CIVIL WAR

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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1996

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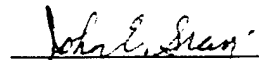
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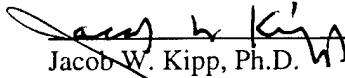
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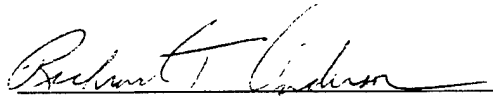
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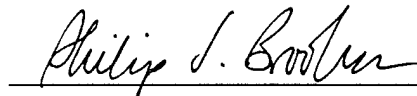
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## ABSTRACT

### SAFE AREAS IN BOSNIA: THEIR IMPACT ON THE UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION AND THE BOSNIAN CIVIL WAR by Major Stephen G. Stewart, US Army, 97 pages.

This paper examines the impact that safe areas had on the UN peace operation, on the opposing factions, and on the overall course of the war.

Ironically, the very safe area measures that were initially conceptualized to relieve the suffering of the civil populace, stem the fighting, and promote the conditions for conflict resolution actually encouraged more fighting and brought further hardship to Muslim civilians. As the UN attempted to deter attacks and defend the safe areas, the Bosnian Government forces converted these safe areas into military bases of operations in the heart of Serb held territory, and they exploited these safe areas as tactical stepping stones to regain lost ground and to force Western intervention.

From their initial implementation in April 1993, the safe areas directly contributed toward a dramatically changed military and political situation, and they hamstrung the UN's humanitarian mission on the ground. This paper also examines US policy toward Bosnia and how the US attempted to exert its influence through NATO airpower to defend the safe areas and to achieve US policy objectives in Bosnia.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The UN has unwittingly prolonged suffering where it meant to relieve it.<sup>1</sup>

Richard K. Betts, Foreign Affairs

The intractable Bosnian civil war has clearly posed a most serious post-Cold War security challenge to the international community. The disintegration of Yugoslavia is linked to an enormously complex web of historical, social, economic, and political factors. In spite of these complexities, the international community--through the auspices of the UN--collectively failed to deal with the war in Bosnia in a sufficient manner. A revolving door of policy shifts, wavering commitment, and bad faith among the warring factions (see definitions) has made an immensely complex situation even worse. With this in mind, operating in a vacuum to complicated events on the ground, the United Nations (UN)--principally the UN Security Council--ushered in a host of restrictive measures (intended to ameliorate the suffering and protect the Muslim populace) that paradoxically encouraged more fighting, undermined the UN's mission, and prolonged the war.

Arguably, of all the UN mandated restrictive measures implemented, the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) governing the concept and implementation of safe areas have most affected the conduct of the war. These safe areas not only changed the war's dynamics, but they also undermined the UN's credibility with its member states and among the warring factions. The warring factions took advantage of "loopholes" in the agreement, and the UN was unwilling and incapable of enforcing the tough language of the safe area resolutions. This policy created a quasi-military environment in which neither side could gain decisive advantage over the other. As a result, a stalemated situation arose between the period of the safe area's inception in April 1992 and until the



fall of Srebrenica in July of 1995. In short, as this thesis will demonstrate, the continuation of the conflict was inextricably linked to an ill-conceived policy of safe areas.

**Research Question.** What impact did the UN Security Council mandated safe areas have on the UN peacekeeping operation and the Bosnian civil war?

**Background and Context.** This thesis will analyze the UN-mandated and un-implemented safe areas in Bosnia and the impact these safe areas had--both intended and unintended--on the principle actors (e.g., the warring factions, the UN, NATO) and the war's dynamics and course. The UN Security Council mandated and implemented a host of resolutions throughout the course of the war. On the surface, most of these resolutions were conceived to add teeth to existing resolutions and refine the UN's mission on the ground. In reality, however, many of these resolutions were implemented during fast-breaking situations and invariably over-sensationalized under worldwide and instantaneous media coverage. This author will examine the "CNN effect" in chapter two. Under the close scrutiny of the media, the Security Council moved to act--generally to mandate further resolution--to ostensibly relieve the situation. Based on the evidence, however, these new mandates were generally passed to offer short-term solutions to immediate problems. They gave the Security Council and the UN's member states the political cover to make it seem like they were not idly standing by when these states lacked the will or interests to resolve the crisis. In this climate, the Security Council voted to established the safe area concept to alleviate the suffering of civilians in designated areas under attack by the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA). In a perverse way, however, the very measures that were initially conceptualized to relieve the suffering of the civil populace and stem the fighting ironically encouraged more fighting and brought further hardship to Muslim civilians. Moreover, the UN deterred attacks and defended the safe areas even when the circumstances leading up to Serb transgressions in and around the safe areas were provoked by the forces of the Bosnian government. These provocations became part of the Bosnian government forces' modus operandi and were normally motivated to elicit Bosnian Serb and UN reactions. With the flexing of its military muscle (principally through the auspices of NATO) under the expansion of the safe area mandate, the UN (through the decisions of the Security Council) became a co-belligerent against the Bosnian Serbs

and thus crossed the "Mogadishu Line." From their initial implementation in April 1993, the safe areas directly contributed toward a dramatically changed military and political situation (both locally and internationally), and they hamstrung the UN's humanitarian mission on the ground.

Although the war continued relatively unabated for several general reasons (e.g., incompatibility of the warring sides' strategic aims, the dynamics of unlimited humanitarian support, and the indecisiveness of the Security Council), an ill-conceived and implemented safe area concept directly and indirectly affected aspects ranging from small-level unit tactics to political posturing at the highest levels of Balkan and international governments. As the permanent representatives collectively applauded their decisive actions in the implementation of the safe areas, security in and around the safe areas began to erode in direct relationship to the shaky framework on which they were predicated.

UN Posture on the Safe Areas. Because of the nature and complexities of this multisided ethnic war in Bosnia, the UN mission on the ground was established on a shaky foundation. From an international perspective, in the aftermath of the Cold War and the Gulf War, the west European and north American governments (principally the NATO allies) were focused on domestic issues and looking forward to reaping the benefits of the so-called peace dividend. Moreover, the NATO allies were ill prepared to handle the emerging realities of ethno-nationalistic conflict with the fall of communism. As the situation in Yugoslavia unraveled in June of 1991, after Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia, the governments of the NATO allies were slow to react because of a host of more pressing concerns, e.g., the reunification of Germany, Maastricht Treaty, and the immediate aftereffects of the Gulf War. Most important, the Europeans miscalculated the powerful and transcending effects of ethnic warfare. That is, "Before the fall of the Berlin wall, the communist order and bipolar systems kept the lid on ethnic problems through the hegemony of the ruling communist parties and the imposed assimilation of all nationalities under the Party's leadership . . . ."<sup>2</sup> The Europeans signaled to the Bush Administration that they could handle problems on their back doorstep, while the US was willing to abdicate a primary leadership role in the former Yugoslavia.

After Slovenia and Croatia broke away from rump-Yugoslavia in June 1991, the rump-Yugoslavia state (led from Belgrade) moved militarily against these two Republics. With virtually no ethnic Serbs in Slovenia proper, Belgrade opted to minimize risk and withdrew its military forces and concentrated its efforts against Croatia instead. After seven months of fighting, Belgrade and Zagreb agreed to the terms of a European Union United Nations (EU-UN) brokered cease-fire. The UN Security Council then established UNPROFOR to monitor the cease-fire and separation of forces in February 1992. The UN Security Council previously authorized a UN mission to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in 1991.<sup>3</sup> Next, the Muslim-dominated government in Sarajevo believed that to prevent minority status and subsequent subjugation under a Serbian state, led by the government in Belgrade, it too would follow Slovenia's and Croatia's lead and form the UN-recognized sovereign state of Bosnia and Hercegovina (with its government in Sarajevo). When this recognition came in April 1992, after a national referendum that the Bosnian Serbs boycotted in mass, the Bosnian Serbs moved militarily to create their own independent state. In June of 1992, the UNPROFOR peacekeeping operation mandate already in effect in Croatia was expanded to cover the ongoing war in Bosnia as well.

With superior military strength and wherewithal, the Bosnian Serb government in Pale unleashed force to carryout its strategy to carve out and expand its territorial holdings in Bosnia to the detriment of the UN recognized government in Sarajevo. As this author will fully explore in chapter three, the Bosnian Serb government in Pale coordinated to varying degrees with the government in Belgrade to not only seize and control regions of Bosnia but to also “ethnically cleanse” the Muslim populace from these areas. Significant Bosnian Serb military gains in the first year of the war led to the near collapse of the Sarajevo government. While the Bosnian Serb government’s regular forces consolidated their gains in eastern and north central Bosnia, the irregular forces preyed upon the poorly defended Muslim towns and cities to wreak havoc and induce fear in the Muslim built-up areas. The Bosnian Serb advances led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Muslims and to the isolation of Muslim “islands” in eastern Bosnia. In the Spring of 1993, when the Bosnian Serbs moved militarily against the trapped enclave of Srebrenica, the Security Council mandated the safe

area of Srebrenica United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 819 to ostensibly protect the 45,000 displaced persons located there.

When the Security Council expanded the mandate to protect the six safe areas in 1993, the overall mission and difficulty in executing the stated mandate grew considerably (and virtually became untenable under Chapter Six) with the adoption of UNSCR 819, 824, and 836.<sup>4</sup> In April 1995, two years after the "temporary" safe area policy was first established and with no conflict resolution in sight, the UNSC requested the Secretary General to prepare a report on the current situation on the ground and the attitudes of the warring parties in relationship to the UNPROFOR mandate.<sup>5</sup> The Security Council requested the study because they sensed a likely deterioration of the security situation on the ground. President Carter's negotiated Christmas 1994 cease-fire elapsed without any diplomatic breakthrough and the military situation clearly pointed toward further fighting in the spring of 1995. In the report, Boutros Boutros Ghali frankly admitted significant problems with the UN's effectiveness in Bosnia, "Since the start of its deployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNPROFOR's mandate has credibility with the parties, with the members of the Security Council and with the public been plagued by ambiguities that have affected the Force's performance as well as its at large."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, he reported that the ability of UNPROFOR to carry out its safe area mission (principally to protect civilians and deter attack on the areas) was severely hamstrung by the "inherent deficiencies of the safe area regime . . . and by the military activities of the two sides."<sup>7</sup> These remarks clearly indicate that the UN was well aware of the inconsistencies of the safe area mandate. Unfortunately for the UN, as NATO was making final preparations for launching a major air campaign in the summer of 1995, this realization of the host of contradictions, inconsistencies, and problems with the mandate came too late.

The Immediate Origins of the Safe Areas. As stated earlier, given the Bosnian Serb military superiority and wherewithal, coupled with the Bosnian Government's lack of preparedness, the Bosnian Serbs quickly consolidated control of about 70 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's land mass in the early phases of the war in 1992. Just eleven months into the war (March 1993), the

Bosnian Serbs intensified their efforts in eastern Bosnia to further reduce Muslim territorial holdings. As the attacks intensified, thousands of Muslims fled into the eastern enclave of Srebrenica seeking refuge. According to UN and press sources, upwards of 30-40 people (presumably civilians) were dying daily directly or indirectly from the military action in and around Srebrenica.<sup>8</sup> Despite the international condemnation of the scale and intensity of the attacks, Serb forces continued their assault on the area. The nature of these assaults, with the indiscriminate bombardment of population centers and with ethnic cleansing at its centerpiece, became unacceptable to the norms of the Security Council.

In an effort to stabilize the situation, the UN adopted a "safe area" concept based on the "safe havens" implemented in response to the Iraqi campaign against the Kurds after the Gulf War.<sup>9</sup> As this author will argue in chapter two of this thesis, the conditions leading up to the declaration of safe havens in Iraq to protect Kurdish refugees in the post-Gulf War period were asymmetrical to the conditions in Bosnia. Because of the humanitarian success of this US-led operation to protect the Kurds, the UN and humanitarian agencies placed stock in the notion of the safe haven type of operations to ameliorate refugee situations and internalize their unchecked movements beyond their country of origin.<sup>10</sup> But prior to the use of safe havens to protect the Kurds (and prevent a mass exodus of Iraqi Kurds into Turkey), the UN Security Council had shown an unwillingness to use safe havens because of the "precedents they might set for the Soviet Union and Baltic states (which at the time [of the Kurdish operation] were still not independent) as well as China and Tibet."<sup>11</sup>

With the Kurdish safe haven precedent in mind, the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 819 under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter on 16 April 1993 in order to stem further Serb advances. On 6 May, in an attempt to avert further deterioration of the situation in other threatened Muslim-majority towns, the UNSC acted on a French proposed plan for creating safe areas. The French were ostensibly concerned with the plight of these civilians under direct contact with the Bosnian Serb military forces. However, with the real potential for a mass exodus of several hundred thousand refugees looming over the horizon, the French devised a plan to keep these civilians in their towns of origin and thereby avert the flow of these refugees into western Europe. Since the western Europeans,

principally the French, Germans, and British feared the destabilizing effects of trying to absorb thousands of Muslim refugees, they privately "called for a containment response: to beef up the work of UNHCR and humanitarian relief to keep those displaced by war from becoming refugees."<sup>12</sup>

With this French plan at its core, the UNSC adopted Resolution 824 which declared five other safe areas: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde, and Bihac. The Security Council declared that in these areas "armed attacks must cease, all Bosnian Serb military or paramilitary units must withdraw and all parties must allow UNPROFOR and international humanitarian agencies free and unimpeded access to all safe areas."<sup>13</sup> On 4 June, based on the recommendations of a Security Council fact-finding mission, the Security Council further expanded the safe area mandate under Resolution 836. Acting under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter, Resolution 836 called for the expansion of UNPROFOR's mission "to protect the safe areas, including to deter attacks against them, to monitor the cease-fire, to promote the withdrawal of military and paramilitary units other than those of the Bosnian Government and to occupy some key points on the ground."<sup>14</sup> Also, in this resolution, the UNSC authorized UNPROFOR "to take all measures, including the use of force, in reply to bombardment . . . or armed incursions . . . against the safe areas."<sup>15</sup> Lastly, in a dangerous precedent not fully evaluated at the time of the resolution's implementation, the Council authorized "that Member States, acting nationally or through regional arrangements, might take all necessary measures, through the use of air power, in and around the safe areas to support UNPROFOR."<sup>16</sup>

In summary, with the adoption of UNSCR 819, 824, and 836 (over the span of just three weeks), the UN moved one gigantic step closer to becoming a co-belligerent in the conflict. As the Economist pointed out, "In promising to protect safe areas, the UN was also promising to protect units of the Bosnian Army in them . . . this sat ill with the UN's claims of impartiality."<sup>17</sup> These stopgap resolutions perhaps brought the Security Council some short term gains in the eyes of the international media, but these very resolutions would serve as the catalyst for a subsequent overall deterioration of the security situation. The Muslim civilians were now technically given protection and the west Europeans averted a refugee problem. With the implementation of the safe areas, a fundamental contradiction emerged: if peacekeeping principles require neutrality and consent of the parties, how

was the UN going to enforce the safe area concept under the declared mandate? Susan Woodward poignantly observed the new dilemma facing the UN:

The creation of safe areas, motivated largely by the humanitarian objective, thus made possible an escalation of the war and further exposure of civilians to bombardment. Because the safe areas were created explicitly as havens for Muslim-majority towns and against Bosnian Serb attack, protecting them with air strikes risked compromising the neutrality of the UN mission. The more that air power was used, the more it moved the UN mission toward war against the Serbs . . . risking a fundamental change in the mandate from a humanitarian to an offensive or enforcement operation that required different rules of engagement and statement of mission.<sup>18</sup>

So, as the UN Security Council deluded itself with new found resolve in a crisis situation (based on the media's over dramatization of the situation), it was unwittingly setting the traps that would snare the UN's mission in the years ahead and force the UN (through NATO) to call for air strikes against Serb forces. In short, the safe area mandate irrecoverably changed the nature of the UN mission and offered an invitation to the Bosnians to continue the fighting.

Warring Faction's Perspective on the Safe Areas. Humanitarian missions are predicated on the distinction between civilians and soldiers. Within the confines of these newly created safe areas, combatants and noncombatants--excluding the very elderly, sick, and young--were virtually indistinguishable. Based on this new dynamic, new tactics of warfare emerged. Seizing on new opportunities as a result of the de facto UN military support, "the Bosnian Government turned the safe areas into bases for rest, recuperation, and resupply of troops within enemy territory that it hoped to regain and for bases from which to fire out of their enclave into Serbian-claimed territory."<sup>19</sup> As the safe area's military situation became untenable from a traditional military sense, the Muslim government forces provoked Serb direct and indirect fires in violation of the safe area agreement to invoke the use of NATO air power against Serb targets. As the recently retired Deputy Commander of the U.S European Command noted, these Muslim tactics were "designed to enlist active military intervention in support of Muslim war aims . . . [with the NATO air power] guaranteeing the Bosnian Government against catastrophic failure in continuing to pursue the military option."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, with the significant media coverage the safe areas garnered, both UN and NATO credibility were increasingly at stake. As a result, the UN and NATO faced a risky dilemma (virtual conundrum):

either to attack Serb transgressors and risk all pretenses of neutrality or to sidestep the situation and risk the label of ineffectiveness.

Over time, the Bosnian government grew to appreciate the media coverage depicting Serb aggression and the international community's inability to effectively manage the safe area regime. Emboldened with these new tactics of exploitation, the Bosnian military stepped up their activity from the safe areas appreciably in the spring of 1995 "for no ostensible military purpose other than to force a BSA (Bosnian Serb Army) overreaction which would lead to further international condemnation."<sup>21</sup>

In rare open admonishment of the Bosnian activity, the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros Ghali issued a report to the Security Council on Muslim transgressions in around the safe areas:

In recent months [Spring of 1995], government forces have considerably increased their military activity in and around most safe areas, and many of them, including Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Bihac, have been incorporated into the broader military campaign of the government's side. The headquarters and logistics installations of the Fifth Corps of the government army are located in the town of Bihac and those of the Second Corps in the town of Tuzla. The government also maintains a substantial number of troops in Srebrenica (in this case in violation of a demilitarization agreement), Gorazde and Zepa, while Sarajevo is the location of the General Command of the government army and other military installations. There is also an ammunition factory in Gorazde.<sup>22</sup>

Conversely, Serb frustration over these Muslim strongholds in the heart of their territory caused paranoia and angst. The Serbs desired to consolidate their control of eastern Bosnia for four general reasons: first, these pockets of resistance--in the aftermath of the war--would be afforded international protection and recognition and allow the Muslims to make inroads against Serb territory and interests in a post-war period; second, containing these enclaves tied down a considerable portion of the BSA's combat power (especially considering the Serbs shortage of manpower); and third, the survival of the enclaves had a negative psychological impact on the Bosnian Serbs. If the Muslims were willing to hold out and persevere in these abject conditions, then Pale's (the Bosnian Serb self-declared capital) desires for a speedy victory seemed less attainable; and last, the Bosnian Serbs had no desire to coexist with the Muslims. They wanted to ethnically cleanse all traces of Muslim existence from their areas of control.

With the stepped-up activity in and around the safe areas, neither side was willing to negotiate in good faith. A negotiated settlement remained remote as long as both sides devised various methods



to take advantage of the emerging safe area loopholes. In absence of a diplomatic breakthrough, Janusz Bugajski, an analyst on east European affairs with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, made the following insightful observation:

Neither Serbs or Muslims see peace agreements as the most important objective. On the contrary, they use various ploys to gain international support and revert to armed conflict when it appears advantageous. The Serbs have used the UN presence as a shield against NATO air strikes. The Bosnians have used it as a source of aid and have tried to pressure or provoke the UN to retaliate against Serb offensives.<sup>23</sup>

US and NATO Policy Affecting Safe Areas. With no troops on the ground, the US held the view that that the conflict in Bosnia was a war of aggression and not a civil war. Initially, the Bush Administration advocated a containment policy and opposed direct commitment of any US ground forces. In the direct aftermath of the Cold War and the Gulf War, the Bush Administration was more inclined to reap the so-called peace dividends rather than muddle in a problem that the Europeans could presumably handle in their direct sphere of influence. As a result, President Bush opted for a containment policy and advocated full support for the UN-backed Vance-Owen peace plan.

In 1992, however, Candidate Clinton attacked President Bush's policy as ineffectual and immoral because the world's sole superpower was turning a blind eye to Bosnian Serb aggression and abdicating its leadership role. Candidate Clinton promised that the US would not condone such wanton behavior against a UN recognized member state under his leadership. Much to the chagrin of the Europeans, President Clinton (upon entering the White House in January 1993) crafted a preliminary policy that was designed to step up the pressure on the Bosnian Serbs (and Serbia proper) and provide tacit support to the Bosnian Government in Sarajevo. Since the new Clinton Administration was unwilling to commit ground troops to the problem, the US became the principal proponent of air power to reverse Bosnian Serb gains and protect Bosnian Muslim civilians. As a leading member of NATO, the US leveraged the alliance to operate out of area to support the UN in Bosnia. As a result, the NATO alliance moved from the periphery of the problem to its center stage. In effect, NATO increasingly became an instrument of US policy goals.

As chapter four will address in detail, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan was scuttled principally because the Clinton Administration did not support the plan's framework. The Clinton

Administration unambiguously aired its objection to the plan because it awarded Serb aggression from their perspective. In the vacuum of the any real peace proposal, the US advocated a "lift and strike" policy. In brief, this policy advocated a lifting of the UN arms embargo on the Bosnian Government while NATO airpower simultaneously conducted airstrikes against Bosnian Serb targets to give Sarajevo the time and breathing space to arm and train. However, because the Europeans unequivocally rejected the plan and the Clinton Administration was unwilling to unilaterally take the lead on the problem, Washington withdrew its call for lift and strike.

In April of 1993, with the Vance-Owen plan scuttled and "lift and strike" shelved, the Clinton Administration backed the Europeans' plans to contain the conflict and to create safe areas as a temporary measure to protect civilians and stem Bosnian Serb attacks in the absence of a credible peace process. As this thesis will argue later, over time the safe area policy became an instrument of US policy as a means to leverage a more assertive UN and NATO position against the Bosnian Serbs. Unfortunately, from a US policy view, the UN and NATO disagreed over the intent, employment, and efficacy of air power to protect the safe areas. In effect, these policy and strategy cleavages would contribute to the stalemated nature of the conflict. As David Owen argued, "From the spring of 1993 to the summer of 1995, the effect of US policy, despite its being called 'containment,' was to prolong the war . . . ." <sup>24</sup>

Ultimately, US support behind the efficacy of air power to thwart Bosnian Serb aggression around the safe areas worked at cross purposes of the UN-supported peace process. The more the US talked about air power as the tool to reverse the consequence of Bosnian Serb force, the more the US "was giving false hope to the Bosnian Government" <sup>25</sup> to continue holding out. Also, the US approach to conflict resolution had two fundamental contradictions at its core: "The US says that its objective is to end the war through negotiated settlement . . . but in reality wants to influence the outcome in favor of Muslims." <sup>26</sup>

Significance of Study and Methodology. Despite the Dayton Accords, instability in Bosnia continues to pose a significant challenge to European regional security. In the post-Cold War period, peacekeeping operations are increasingly playing a more significant role. Moreover, roles and

missions for the UN are changing vis-à-vis the context of the post-Cold War era. If the United Nations intends to be the leading organization in conflict resolution, it must grapple with the complexities of peace operations in this new environment and adapt to the emerging challenges or face irrelevance on the world stage. The instrument of safe areas (and their enforcement) had an immeasurable impact on the course of this war. More broadly, this instrument will also impact peace operations in the future. Before the UN adopts safe areas in any peace operation in the future, it should thoroughly evaluate the repercussions and lessons learned from the Bosnian safe area policy.

This paper will examine the impact that the safe areas had on the UN peace operation (including the decision-making process of the Security Council), on the opposing factions, and on the overall course of the war. Organizationally and relevant to the safe areas, this thesis will address three distinct subjects areas in separate chapters. First, chapter two will examine the UN's perspective on the safe area concept and policy. This chapter will focus on the decision-making process of the UN Security council, why the Security Council elected to pursue this controversial policy, and how their decisions relevant to the safe areas profoundly affected the UN peace operation and the nature of the war on the ground. Second, chapter three will evaluate the opposing side's perspective on the safe area policy and how these sides exploited (or attempted to exploit) the safe area policy to support their overall strategic aims. Third, chapter four will assess US and NATO policy toward the war and how their policies affected the safe area dynamics. In chapter five, this author will analyze the findings in the earlier chapters and make an assessment as to the overall impact the safe areas had on the course of the war and the UN effort to provide humanitarian support and conflict resolution. With a particular focus on the key UN Security Council Resolutions governing the conduct of the safe areas (e.g., UNSCR 819, 824, and 836), this author will examine how the UN Security Council designed, implemented, and enforced (through UNPROFOR and NATO) the safe area policy.

This author will use a dialectic approach to examine and analyze the literature on the UN-mandated safe areas in Bosnia. In a step-by-step process, this paper will first establish a base line picture of what accelerants forced the UN Security Council to expand the peacekeeping mandate to incorporate the safe area policy. Once the stage is set, the study will then examine the process,

dialogue, and debate the Security Council engaged in before mandating the safe areas. For most of this analysis, this author will examine Security Council resolutions, UN and UN Protection Forces reports and documents, and academic writings. Next, this author will examine the literature to determine how the safe area policy affected the warring factions' perspectives on the war and how the major external actors reacted to the new dynamics of the war. In turn, this author will review both US and NATO policy decisions in relation to the safe area policy and determine the impact these policies had on the safe areas and with the overall UN peace process. Last, in chapter five, this author will use Philip Crowl's "Strategist's Short Catechism"<sup>27</sup> methodology to analyze the findings of the previous chapters and determine the efficacy, suitability, and feasibility of the safe area policy for not only the situation in Bosnia, but for its future use in other peace operations as well.

Operational Definition of Key Terms. Some of the more important definitions and terms used throughout this thesis include the following:

Bosniacs. According to the Sarajevo government, this is the preferred label for the Bosnian Muslims, and it is used in the 1994 constitution of the Croat-Muslim Federation.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding the Muslims' preference, this author will use the more familiar term of Bosnians throughout this paper.

Ethnic Cleansing. The forced exodus of an "undesirable population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these."<sup>29</sup>

Mogadishu line. Term derived from the American-led intervention in Somalia. The term refers to the critical moment when a mission--presumably a UN peace operation--changes from being peacekeeping to co-belligerency.

Peacekeeping. According to the publication above, peacekeeping refers to "military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement (cease-fire, truce, etc.) and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement."<sup>30</sup>

Peace Enforcement. This term refers to the "Application of military force, or the threat of its use, normally pursuant to international authorization, to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order."<sup>31</sup>

Peace Operations. According to the Joint Warfighting Center's Joint Task Force Commander's Hand Book for Peace Operations, peace operations "encompass peacekeeping operations (PKO), peace enforcement operations, and other military operations conducted in support of diplomatic efforts to establish and maintain peace."<sup>32</sup>

Safe Area. A UN designated area technically free from any armed attack or any other hostile act. UN Security Council adopted resolution 824 declaring the existence of six safe areas in May 1993. In particular, the towns of Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde, Bihac, Srebrenica, and the city of Sarajevo would be treated as safe areas by all the parties concerned. The Council further declared that in these areas all armed attacks must cease, all Bosnian Serb military or paramilitary units must withdraw, and all parties must allow UNPROFOR and international humanitarian agencies free and unimpeded access to all safe areas.

Warring Factions. In principal, there were three distinct factions fighting for their own self-interests in Bosnia during the civil war: the Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs. The Muslim-led Government of Bosnia and Hercegovina gained UN recognition in April of 1992. This government, which is led from Sarajevo, professes to be multi-ethnic in nature. As a precondition for secession from rump-Yugoslavia and UN recognition as a sovereign member state, the European Community, United States and the UN required the Sarajevo Government to conduct a nation wide referendum. As the Bosnian Serbs boycotted the referendum in mass, a majority of the those who voted elected to secede from Yugoslavia in this 1 March 1992 referendum. However, the move to secede without the consent of the Serbs (who represented 34 percent of the total population in Bosnia) was a clear violation of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution.<sup>33</sup> With these complexities and legalities in mind, different interpretations emerged as to what necessarily constitutes a faction and as to what constitutes a legitimately recognized entity. Even though the Muslim-led Government in

Sarajevo is UN recognized, the three groups will be all treated equally as warring factions throughout this thesis. See chapter three for more discussion on this subject.

Restrictive Measures. This term applies to the host of UN mandated and implemented concepts designed to essentially curb the lethality of the Bosnian Serb combat power as a means to protect the UN humanitarian effort and the civil populace from the conduct of war. Examples of restrictive measures include: safe areas, weapons control points, no-fly zones, tactical exclusion zones, and demilitarized zones.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richard K. Betts, "The Delusion of Impartial Intervention," Foreign Affairs 73, no. 6, (November-December 1994): 21.

<sup>2</sup>Jacob W. Kipp and Timothy L. Thomas, Ethnic Conflict: Scourge of the 1990's, Foreign Military Studies Office, US Army Combined Arms Command, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 4.

<sup>3</sup>United States General Accounting Office. Humanitarian Intervention: Effectiveness of UN Operations in Bosnia (GOA/NSIAD-94-156BR) Washington, D.C., April 1994, 2.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Security Council, "Report of the secretary-general Pursuant to Security Council Resolutions 982 and 987," 30 May 1995, UN data base, NetScape, 1.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup>Lewis MacKenzie, "Tragic Errors", Maclean's, 12 December 1994, 35.

<sup>9</sup>Susan L. Woodward, Balkan Tragedy. Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1995), 307.

<sup>10</sup>Mark Duffield, "Bosnia and the Future of Military Humanitarianism," Middle East Report, (March-June 1994): 20.

<sup>11</sup>Michael M. Gunter, The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 56.

<sup>12</sup>Woodward, 295.

<sup>13</sup>United Nations Department of Public Information, "UN and the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia, 15 March 1994, 15.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 16

<sup>17</sup>"Black and Gray," Economist, 5 August 1995, 48.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>19</sup>Woodward, 320.

<sup>20</sup>Charles G. Boyd, "Making Peace with the Guilty: the Truth about Bosnia," Foreign Affairs, 74, no. 5, (September/October 1995): 32.

<sup>21</sup>John E. Sray, "US Policy and the Bosnian Civil War: A Time for Reevaluation," European Security, Summer 1995, 325.

<sup>22</sup>"Black and Gray," 48.

<sup>23</sup>Janusz, Bugajski, "Bosnia's Precarious Future," Supplement, 6 March 1995, 66.

<sup>24</sup>David Owen, Balkan Odyssey, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995), 365.

<sup>25</sup>MacKenzie, 36.

<sup>26</sup>Boyd, 23.

<sup>27</sup>Philip Crowl, "The Strategist's Short Catechism: Six Questions Without an Answer," in John F. Reichart and Steven R. Strum, American Defense Policy, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, 84.

<sup>28</sup>Owen, xxii.

<sup>29</sup>Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, "A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing," Foreign Affairs, 72, no. 3, (Summer 1993), 110.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., EX-1.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., EX-1.

<sup>32</sup>Joint Warfighting Center, Joint Task Force Commander's Hand Book for Peace Operations, Ft Monroe, Virginia, 28 February 1995, EX-1.

<sup>33</sup>Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, "America and Bosnia," The National Interest, Fall 1993, 16.



## CHAPTER 2

### UN PERSPECTIVE ON SAFE AREA MANDATE AND CONCEPT

There is a fantastic gap between the resolutions of the Security Council, the will to execute those resolutions, and the means available to the commanders in the field.<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant General Briquemont, Ethics and International Affairs

For over two years (between April 1993 and July of 1995), the policy of safe areas was the centerpiece to the United Nations' mandate in Bosnia. However, with the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa--two of the UN six declared safe areas in Bosnia--in July of 1995, the concept's credibility collapsed. In the aftermath of the Srebrenica debacle, a Dutch Defense Ministry spokesman lamented, "We are very, very sorry that we couldn't do anything for the thousands of men who were killed or are in detention camps . . . But we have to conclude that the troops were given a task that could not be performed with the means they had."<sup>2</sup> The Dutch were assigned the task of trying to "protect" 50,000 refugees with 450 lightly armed peacekeepers. A fundamental building block of the safe area framework called for a robust force structure to deter Serb attacks. Although the Dutch were the immediate scapegoat, the retreat of the Dutch was emblematic of the UN Security Council's inability to define its goals and objectives in Bosnia.

The Bosnian Serb seizure of Srebrenica delivered the final blow to a policy that was stillborn from its conception. More broadly, the entire UN's credibility suffered markedly. If the UN could not honor its word here--in the plain view of international attention--where could the UN honor it in the world today or in the future? From the perspective of the media's over-sensationalism and the receiving end of an ill-informed audience (an audience that received most of its "information" without thorough analysis and without placing it in its proper context), the fall of these UN protected safe areas was illustrative of the incompetence of the UN and the savagery of the Bosnian Serbs. With a more

detailed look, however, the fall of these safe areas was the predictable result of an inevitable process based on the lack of political will among the Security Council members and the military context on the ground. Stated differently, given the shaky framework the safe areas were based on 27 months earlier, they were destined to fall. In a counter argument, and in retrospect, if the UN was more forceful with the terms of the agreement (e.g., the call for disarmament) and with the application of its deterrence piece (e.g., employing air power through the auspices of NATO) then the safe area concept might have worked. Again, with an examination of the political context of the time, it does not seem the UN Security Council permanent representatives were willing to expend political capital and military treasure in enforcing this mandate.

Another factor compounding the problem was the notion of "protection." To the media and public at large, the "protection" in the acronym UNPROFOR was falsely interpreted to mean unequivocal protection of all civilians and direct assistance by the UN to safeguard Muslim areas and interests. To understand how the safe area concept has directly and indirectly affected the warring factions and the UN mission, it is necessary to examine the background and context that led to the establishment of these safe areas.

As stated in chapter one, with their superior force and wherewithal coupled with the Bosniacs military unpreparedness, the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) quickly consolidated control of over 70 percent of Bosnia's territory in the first six months of the war. During the Fall of 1992, the BSA launched a campaign to defeat Muslim resistance in the eastern region of Bosnia. The Muslim held areas in eastern Bosnia (the cities of Foca, Srebrenica, Zepa, Gorazde, and Cerska) were supported from the market city of Tuzla, the headquarters of the BiH 2 Corps. Even though the BSA gained control of the key town of Zvornik, which effectively cut off the eastern enclaves from the contiguous held Muslim areas in central Bosnia, the BSA offensive stalled in the early winter months because of the severely restricted terrain, winter weather, and Muslim resistance. In an effort to preserve the initiative and consolidate their gains, the BSA moved decisively to defeat the last pockets of Muslim resistance in this region in January of 1993. From a strictly military perspective, and in no way condoning the practice of ethnic cleansing, the move to defeat these pockets of resistance seemed militarily

justifiable. These pockets provided the Bosnian Government forces areas in which they could stage operations from within the heart of Bosnian Serb held territory along the strategically vital Drina River (which is adjacent to Serbia proper). This Drina River Basin was vital because it sits astride significant lines of communication and was endowed with important industrial factories and raw resources.

Despite the international condemnation of the scale and intensity of these attacks, Bosnian Serb forces continued their assault on the area. From the Bosnian Serb's military perspective, the Muslim populace would eventually flee the area under the barrage of their artillery. But, compounding the agony of the local populace, the local SDA (Bosnian Party of Democratic Action) political leaders prevented civilians from leaving Srebrenica because they feared their mass exodus would cause the town to fall.<sup>3</sup> Arguably, if the civilians had fled to central Bosnia when they had the opportunity, the entire issue of safe areas would have been a moot point. Next, acting without guidance from UN Secretariat in New York, the Commander of UNPROFOR, General Philippe Morillon, deployed a contingent of Canadian Peacekeepers to Srebrenica to defuse the situation in May of 1993.<sup>4</sup> With a fait accompli apparently achieved--and to avoid risking direct confrontation with the UN and thus receive further condemnation from the international community--the BSA agreed to suspend their attacks and to accept the terms of an UNPROFOR brokered cease fire.

In an effort to stabilize the deteriorating situation in Srebrenica and prevent another mass exodus of refugees, while the events were unfolding live on CNN, the UN Security Council met in emergency session. In this crisis setting, the Council adopted a French proposed "safe area" concept, based on the safe haven policy applied in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War, and Srebrenica became the first area placed under UN protection. Based on its effectiveness in Iraq, the French used the safe haven policy to "protect" the Kurds as a practical analogy to ameliorate the situation.

In spite of the major differences between the conflict in northern Iraq and Bosnia, this safe area concept became integral to all three UNSCR's governing the six Muslim controlled enclaves and became a centerpiece to the newly expanded peacekeeping mandate. The modified mandate now

called for the protection of Muslims. As stated earlier in Chapter One, with the adoption of UNSCR 819, 824, and 836 (over the span of just three weeks), the UN Security Council unwittingly gravitated toward becoming a co-belligerent in the conflict. This was in direct contradiction to the UN's core tenet of impartiality under Chapter Seven and to the UN mandate in Bosnia.

With this general overview as a backdrop, a more detailed examination of the roots of the safe area concept and each of the resolutions (and the process that produced them) is warranted. While ostensibly the French were alarmed over the untenable situation for Muslim civilians in eastern Bosnia, in reality, they (as well as most of the west Europeans) were most concerned over the prospects of yet another mass wave of Bosnian refugees into western Europe. The war in former Yugoslavia displaced over four million people by June of 1994.<sup>5</sup> While the spectacle of ethnic cleansing and the plight of Muslim civilians caught the attention of the media and inspired public opinion, the looming crisis of trying to absorb hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees pragmatically moved west European diplomats and decision-makers to find a solution to avert yet another refugee exodus.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Susan Woodward argues,

One of the more immediate concerns for the Europeans was the direct effect the war was beginning to have on them through the flow of refugees. Germany, the primary foreign host, began to demand after mid-July [1992] that European countries set quotas for the number of refugees they were willing to accept. This called for a containment response: to beef up the work of UNHCR and humanitarian relief to keep those displaced by war from becoming refugees. As one of the prime targets of German criticism for not accepting a fair share of refugees, Britain proposed that safe havens for civilians be established within Bosnia, based on the program designed for the Kurdish population in Iraq after Operation Desert Storm . . . .<sup>7</sup>

As Woodward indicates, the British initially proposed the concept of safe areas for Bosnia. But, based on the literature, it appears they dropped their support of the plan when they later surmised that the plan would ultimately lead to the partitioning of Bosnia along ethnic lines. In November of 1992, the French resuscitated the original British concept and introduced a formal proposal of the idea of safe areas to the Security Council. However, the Security Council delayed further action on the idea because it perceived that any attempt to institute safe areas would in effect lead to Bosnia's ethnic partition.<sup>8</sup> That is, in November of 1992, most western governments still clung to the notion that a multi-ethnic Bosnia was still possible.

In a contemporary parallel, in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf war in 1991, Ankara was similarly concerned with the issue of trying to cope with tens of thousands of Kurdish refugees flowing into Turkey from northern Iraq. The Ozal Government leveraged the UN, under the guise of humanitarian concern and international law, to step in and prevent the inhumane treatment of Kurdish civilians under direct attack from an aggressor force.

Both Ankara (regarding the Kurds) and Paris (regarding the Bosnians) rationalized the need for "safe havens" to "protect" innocent civilians. In reality, however, it appears that both Ankara and Paris were more preoccupied with the destabilizing effects directly associated with massive refugee flows into their respective countries.

Mark Duffield, a UNHCR official familiar with the concept of safe areas, said, "Since Kurdistan we have seen a policy of attempting, through safe-haven type of operations, to internalize refugee movements within the country of origin. This can only work if the UN will follow up with enforcement. Otherwise, people see it--correctly--as a lethal trap."<sup>9</sup>

In retrospect, the analogy of safe havens for the Kurds following the Gulf War was not symmetrical with the notion of safe areas for Bosnia in the middle of a civil war. First, in Iraq the "West [principally the United States] was more involved in the situation, since it just fought the war [to defeat Saddam Hussein] and then encouraged the Kurdish uprising that had led to the problem . . . as the victor of the Gulf War, the United States might be deemed to have had residual rights of conquest to take such action."<sup>10</sup> After the Bush Administration "called upon the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship,"<sup>11</sup> the Kurds launched a rebellion against Saddam's legitimacy. Although hamstrung from the Gulf War, Saddam moved decisively to quell the uprising. The Kurds defeat triggered a mass refugee flow along the borders of Turkey and Iran. The international media coverage of about 500,000 Kurdish refugees lingering along the Turkish border with Iraq provided the impetus for the United States to lead a coalition to ameliorate the situation. Second, the United States and its coalition partners were sensitive to the request of the Turkish Government for support. Turkey was strategically invaluable for basing rights and as a secular Muslim partner for the US led coalition against Iraq; moreover, Turkey is a key member of NATO.

Third, the safe havens' deterrence clause--the prospects of yet another wave of relentless allied airstrikes against an already crippled Iraqi state--was credible. That is, Baghdad's decisive defeat in the Gulf War was fresh in the mind of Saddam. "Force projection and force demonstrations convinced the Iraqis of the sanctity of the security zone."<sup>12</sup> Saddam knew first hand not to challenge America's word immediately following the Gulf War; on the other hand, the Bosnian Serbs had not felt the enduring effects of a concerted air campaign. Fourth, unlike Bosnia, the terrain along the Iraqi safe haven line was unrestrictive and uniform. In contrast, the six safe areas in Bosnia were isolated islands in rugged mountainous terrain. Fifth, the clear weather over northern Iraq facilitated the allied air patrols over the region. Last, and the most important factor that contributed to the asymmetrical situations between the two areas, was US leadership. The Bush Administration made it unequivocally clear to Iraq and to the UN that it was going to intervene in the situation. As the sole super power, the US's commitment can leverage the UN into action when it so desires.

In Bosnia, none of these factors were part of this safe area equation. That is, the Bosnian Serbs were the clear victors of the war at the time and had not felt the punishing effects of an air and ground campaign; no NATO partner's security was directly at stake; the UN's deterrence policy had little or no effect on the emboldened Serbs; the weather and terrain in Bosnia does not support air power; and the US was still a peripheral player in Bosnia at the time.

Notwithstanding these dissimilarities, UNSCR 819 was conceived and implemented on 16 April 1993 to deal directly with the untenable situation around Srebrenica. As the Serb forces tightened their hold of the area within the view of international media coverage, the Security Council was forced to intervene. Interestingly, at the same time the Security Council moved to adopt 819, with the safe area concept at its core, the UN Secretariat reprimanded General Morillon for stationing peacekeepers in harms way and for exceeding the terms of the existing mandate.<sup>13</sup>

Resolution 819, adopted under provisions of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, "demanded that all parties treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a safe area which should be free from any armed attack or any other hostile act . . . it demanded the immediate withdrawal of Bosnia Serb paramilitary

units from areas surrounding Srebrenica and the cessation of armed attacks against the town."<sup>14</sup> Although the resolution was clearly ambitious in scope, its demands were unambiguous.

There are three other points from the resolution that are worth addressing here. First, the Security Council "requested the Secretary-General to take steps to increase the presence of UNPROFOR in Srebrenica and to arrange for the transfer of the ill and wounded."<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, although the Security Council consistently levied more demands for more troops to do more tasks, the member states, in particular the permanent members on the Security Council, did not want to send more troops to an already bad situation (both France and the United Kingdom were leading troop contributors). Second, the Security Council directed that a fact finding mission should deploy immediately to Bosnia to investigate the situation on the ground. This mission, composed of representatives of France, Hungary, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Venezuela, toured the region from 22 through 27 April.<sup>16</sup> The findings of this mission would directly impact on UNSCR 824 and 836. Third, in the terms of the cease fire agreement signed on 17 April, UNPROFOR and the warring parties agreed to the demilitarization of Srebrenica. Just four days later, General Morillon reported that 170 peacekeepers, UN civil police (UNCIVPOL) and military observers had deployed to Srebrenica and that they had successfully demilitarized the town.<sup>17</sup> The demilitarization (in reality or in myth) of Srebrenica, and subsequently the other five safe areas, became one of the more contentious issues linked to the safe area concept

Next, on 6 May, based on the recommendations of a Security Council fact-finding mission's report and in an attempt to avert further deterioration in other threatened Muslim-majority towns, the UNSC adopted Resolution 824. The fact finding mission report recommended that the "concept of safe areas be extended to other towns in need of safety."<sup>18</sup> Further, the report stated:

The Srebrenica arrangement cannot be a model but should inspire action by the Security Council to prevent the fall of further enclaves and territories, such as Gorazde, Zepa, and Tuzla, which demand immediate attention . . . Gorazde and Zepa in particular are today in a situation of great vulnerability. The outcome could be similar to that in Srebrenica if firm actions are not taken immediately. A Security Council resolution to declare them safe areas should be considered without delay in consultation with UNPROFOR. Tuzla is a different situation, but the displaced persons (200,000) who have moved there are weakening its capacity to resist. The Mission also recommends that it be declared a safe area. Sarajevo is a symbol of plurality where Serbs, Croats, Jews, and Muslims have coexisted for centuries. This is the capital of all the peoples of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and should become a safe area.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the scope of resolution 819, resolution 824 was adopted to broaden the isolated events around Srebrenica to cover all the Muslim-controlled areas cut off from central Bosnia's contiguous territory and under Bosnian Serb Army military pressure. The Mission believed that the Security Council should designate certain towns or enclaves as safe areas to act as a measure of "preventative diplomacy" to safeguard these vulnerable areas before they came under attack.<sup>20</sup> Fully realizing the impact of their recommendations, the Mission recognized that this concept would "require a larger UNPROFOR presence, a revised mandate to encompass cease-fire/safe area monitoring and different rules of engagement; but it would be a step that stopped short of the sort of military strike enforcement measures that are now being openly debated."<sup>21</sup> With these recommendations, the Security Council moved immediately to adopt Resolution 824, which formally established the safe areas of Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde, and Bihac. Curiously, there is no mention in the Mission's report on the situation in Bihac. The available literature does not address this issue. But since the Bihac area proved to be one of the more vulnerable and important strategic areas in the former Yugoslavia, it stands to reason that the Security Council added Bihac to the list in an attempt to stabilize this region. Acting under Chapter VII on the UN Charter, the Council declared that in these areas "armed attacks must cease, all Bosnian Serb military or paramilitary units must withdraw, that any taking of territory by force cease immediately, and all parties must allow UNPROFOR and international humanitarian agencies free and unimpeded access to all safe areas."<sup>22</sup>

Although, the language of this resolution sounded forceful, it clearly seemed divorced from the reality of the situation on the ground. Real progress with the Vance-Owen peace plan being absent, these demands were wholly unrealistic. For example, a call for the warring factions to refrain from seizing territory by force in a state of war directly contradicts the fundamental rationale for why states opt for armed conflict to begin. Without progress on the diplomatic front, the demands of this resolution seemed unsuitable and unfeasible.

The Security Council omitted an enforcement component for the newly passed resolutions (819, and 824).<sup>23</sup> The available literature does not provide an answer as to why this provision was omitted. Nonetheless, on 4 June 1993, the Council decided to further expand the mandate of



UNPROFOR to enable it to protect and deter attacks on the safe areas. Again, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, Resolution 836 enabled "UNPROFOR to protect the safe areas, including to deter attacks against them, to monitor the cease-fire, to promote the withdrawal of military and paramilitary units other than those of the Bosnian government and to occupy some key points on the ground."<sup>24</sup> Also, in this resolution, the UNSC authorized UNPROFOR "to take all measures, including the use of force, in reply to bombardment . . . or armed incursions . . . against the safe areas."<sup>25</sup> In a dangerous precedent not fully evaluated at the time of the resolution's implementation, the Council authorized "that Member States, acting nationally or through regional arrangements, might take all necessary measures, through the use of air power, in and around the safe areas to support UNPROFOR."<sup>26</sup> With this language, the Security Council moved full throttle toward the Mogadishu Line. However, in the body of the resolution, the Security Council did acknowledge the temporary nature of the safe areas with the intent of leveraging the Vance-Owen peace process. With the pitfalls of mission creep in mind, the Security Council attempted to temper the long term effects of this policy in the absence of a peace process:

Safe areas are intended to respond to an emergency situation, and noting that the concept proposed by France in document S/25800 and by others could make a valuable contribution and should not in any way be taken as an end in itself, but as part of the Vance-Owen process and as a first step to a lasting political solution . . . These safe areas are a temporary measure and the primary objective remains to reverse the consequences of the use of force . . . .<sup>27</sup>

With these ambitious goals set in motion, the onus for making the policy work fell directly upon the Secretary General's area of responsibility. What is more, the Security Council levied three additional demands on the Secretary General:

To make the adjustments or reinforcement of UNPROFOR which might be required by the implementation to the present resolution, and to consider assigning UNPROFOR elements in support of the units entrusted with protection of safe areas . . . to direct the UNPROFOR Force Commander to redeploy to the extent possible the forces under his command . . . calls upon member states to contribute forces to facilitate the implementation of the provision regarding the safe areas . . . .<sup>28</sup>

In retrospect, in a so called peacekeeping environment, the language of UNSCR 836 was the product of an exasperated Security Council. With no more good options left, the Security Council decided to implement an instrument that was only tested once since the UN's inception. Since the safe

havens were effective in Iraq, notwithstanding their contextual differences, the Security Council took a leap of faith and rationalized that they would work in Bosnia as well.

In addition, it appears the language of the resolution was not carefully analyzed to flesh out its potential pitfalls. Two central questions arise from the analysis of the language in the resolution: why did the security council act the way it did? Was it as divorced from reality as the language of the text suggests? David Rieff argues that the safe area policy was adopted to give the Security Council an image of doing something about events on the ground that were beyond their collective political will to stop:

The safe havens policy was adopted after the Bosnian Serbs had turned Srebrenica into a killing ground. In France, there was great pressure on the Mitterrand government for military intervention, and pressure was building in Britain. In the view of many observers at the UN, in and out of the Secretariat, the French and British had to be seen to be doing something, and designation of some towns in Bosnia as safe areas demonstrated resolve without actually committing the UN or NATO to very much . . . . By contrast, the US favored the policy because it was at least leaning toward stepped-up military engagement. Declaring safe areas seemed a step in that direction.<sup>29</sup>

Within the context of this political background, it appears that the Security Council caved in to US pressures ratcheted up from the ineffectual response of UNPROFOR to deal with the military gains of the BSA. Based on the evidence, the Security Council was not concerned with the long term effects of the safe areas. For expediency, in an effort to move the dire situation of the eastern enclaves off the front pages, the Security Council was in search of an instrument that would give it an image of doing something in the face of wanton Bosnian Serb assaults without directly confronting the Bosnian Serbs.

In essence, Resolution 824 expanded the ideas inherent in 819, and Resolution 836 further expanded the mandate to provide the means to enforce 824. Under closer examination of resolution 836, a curious reference to a seemingly insignificant French submitted document (S/25800) is made. Document S/25800 and S/25700 (fact finding mission report) mirrors the essential framework for 836. According to the French recommendation in S/25800: "It seems to us that the effective participation on the ground of United States and the Russian Federation with the countries already involved would confer added credibility to such a concept of safe areas . . . ."<sup>30</sup>

With the adoption of the safe area concept, a powerful shift occurred in the war. A shift that was not fully understood by any of the principal actors at the time and that would have far-reaching political and military consequences later. Of the principal actors--within the international community and the warring factions--the Bosnian Government was the first to fully comprehend the new possibilities. It appears the Bosnian Serbs scaled back their attacks not because they thought air strikes were imminent, but rather they had accomplished much of their military goal by taking control of most of eastern Bosnia and forcing thousands of Muslims into what clearly seemed to be an untenable situation.

There were three distinct reactions from the principal actors to the new safe area resolutions. To the Bosnian Serbs, it meant that they had pushed the limits of their military operations in relationship to the international community's threshold of tolerance. Accordingly, based on their fait accompli of the eastern enclaves, a break in their offensive seemed prudent. To the international community (read the UN Security Council), it ostensibly demonstrated their resolve to put a lid on the violence. To the Muslims, a powerful strategic shift occurred--the international community was now on record as stating it would effectively prevent a further collapse of their holdings. In effect, the UN crossed the Mogadishu line with the adoption of the safe areas. To Bosnians, the clear losers of the war thus far, they were being given a win-win situation (*carte blanche*). If their attacks against Serb positions succeeded, then they gained ground in a traditional military sense. If their attacks failed, the UN (or NATO or the US) would be obliged to protect them under the guise of the safe areas mandate.

With the implementation of the safe areas, the UN expanded its mission from an essentially well-defined humanitarian mission to an ambiguous and ambitious mission to "contain the conflict by imposing constraints on the belligerents."<sup>31</sup> To achieve the objectives of this new policy, it was necessary to increase UN force levels. Declaring the enclaves as safe areas was the easy part. The UN now had to find thousands of troops to enforce the expanded mandate. The UN planners in the Secretary-General's office estimated that about "40,000 peacekeepers were needed to fully protect humanitarian convoys as well as Bosnians in safe areas (17,700 were needed to minimally carry out the extended mission)."<sup>32</sup> Estimates from UNPROFOR command on the ground were much higher.

General McKenzie estimated that it would take "100,000 troops to protect the safe areas . . . General Briquemont said he would try it with a minimum of 70,000. He received absolutely zero increase during the first few months of the new mandate, ultimately receiving fewer than 1,000 troops to do the work of 70,000 to 100,000."<sup>33</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the adoption of the safe areas, only one country (Pakistan) offered to provide additional troops. A week later, with no volunteers stepping forward, Russia expressed a willingness to participate in a limited role to offset the shortfall.<sup>34</sup> But, with only two member states offering troops under limited conditions, the Secretary General and the Security Council planners were forced to develop alternate options. In the initial French safe area proposal, three tiers of force options were discussed. These options included two light packages and one heavy package. The two "light options" (one calling for formed units and the other without formed units) were designed to "deter aggression, to observe the cease-fire, and to facilitate relief operations."<sup>35</sup> More revealingly, the French admitted the light package would only "establish a symbolic UN presence . . . and provide monitoring of a limited perimeter with relatively weak forces."<sup>36</sup> The light options called for a brigade size unit for Sarajevo and battalion size units for the other areas (about 10,000 troops). The heavy option included the same provisions of the light options, but it also added the tasks to "open up one or more logistic corridors through Serb held areas and, if necessary, to collect heavy weapons and to carry out demilitarization."<sup>37</sup> Although it appears the Security Council preferred the specified tasks of the "heavy option," the diplomats could not stomach the troop strength it received. The French estimated that it would take about an additional 40,000 troops (a division size unit for Sarajevo and brigade size units for the other areas) to implement the heavy option.

Later In June of 1993, the Secretary General officially informed the Council that about "34,000 additional troops would be required if deterrence through strength was to be obtained, but he said that it would be possible to start implementing resolution 836 with a light option of 7,600, as an initial approach with limited objectives that assumed the consent of the parties . . . ."<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, in resolution 844 (18 June 1993), the Security Council opted for the light option based on the Secretary General's recommendation.

With the passage of the safe area resolutions, the Security Council implemented decisions to commit a robust force package without the necessary accompanying will from its member states to send the additional troops.<sup>39</sup> According to General MacKenzie, "With the UN Security Council incapable of convincing the General Assembly to provide the troops necessary to protect the safe havens, all we had was a high profile bluff--and the Bosnian Serbs knew it. The Security Council was now accelerating down the slippery slope and--with continuing good intentions but ignoring conventional military wisdom--made a fatal miscalculation."<sup>40</sup> In addition, the Secretary General complained that it took him over a year to organize and muster the 7,600 troops required for the expanded mandate.<sup>41</sup>

One of the key elements of resolution 819, 824, and 836 was the notion of demilitarization. As addressed earlier, the concept of demilitarization became the most contentious issues arising over the safe area policy. In order to obtain the initial cease fire around Srebrenica, which again led directly to UNSCR 819, the Bosnians agreed to a BSA demand for the town's demilitarization. That is, it seems from the evidence, that demilitarization of Srebrenica was supposed to occur based on the cease-fire agreement. With the broadening of the safe area concept under the stipulations of 824 and then 836, however, the notion of demilitarization was dropped from the text. In the original French recommendation that provided the impetus for safe areas (S/25800), they only recommended a demilitarization provision under their "heavy option" force package.<sup>42</sup> In other words, if the UN deployed the robust force package of about a divisional size unit for Sarajevo and brigade size units for each of the other five safe areas (about 45,000 peacekeepers total), then a demilitarization task would be assigned to the UNPROFOR Commander. Under the French "light options," the concept of demilitarization was not addressed. The Secretary General's Fact Finding Mission's recommendations also used ambiguous language in its bottom line recommendation on the issue of demilitarization. The mission simply recommended that the Security Council should define "the extent of disarmament and demilitarization" in each of the safe areas.

Because of the military realities on the ground and the political realities at the UN, the Security Council skirted around the issue of demilitarization for all intents and purposes. Among the

litany of tasks spelled out in UNSCR 836, UNPROFOR was directed to "promote the withdrawal of military and paramilitary units other than those of the Bosnian Government."<sup>43</sup> Since the concept of demilitarization was omitted from the language, it seems evident that the UN implicitly made the Bosnians ultimately responsible for their own defense. Much later in May 1995, Boutros Boutros Ghali, specifically tried to set the record straight regarding the demilitarization of the safe areas:

It should be recalled that resolution 836 (1993) does not require the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to withdraw its military or paramilitary units from the safe areas . . . however the Council has made it clear that provocations by whomever committed were unacceptable.<sup>44</sup>

In the end, despite the claims of the media, the facts show that none of the safe areas were ever demilitarized. In essence, the safe area resolutions implicitly allowed for the presence of Bosnian government (BiH) military forces. The Security Council only asked for this force to refrain from eliciting provocations in or around the safe areas. From the Bosnian Serb perspective, if these areas were not demilitarized, they became active military strong points for Bosnian Government forces. In turn, if Bosnian military forces were staged within these declared safe areas, then they became legitimate military targets. On the one hand, by allowing the Bosnians to provide for their own defense, the UN reasoned it would prevent a significant increase of UN manpower to do this difficult task; on the other hand, the Bosnian Serbs perceived that the UN was favoring the military ambitions of the Muslims in the heart of their controlled areas. Paradoxically, with the demilitarization clause lifted from the safe area mandate, the UN was inviting Bosnian Serb attacks upon these areas. The Bosnian Serbs rationalized that they could attack these areas, "even if they risked NATO airstrikes, to exert pressure on the UN to create an exclusion zone that would be more likely to demilitarize the areas in fact."<sup>45</sup>

Over time, the French-initiated safe area proposal caused an intra-diplomatic rift between the UN Security Council and the UN Secretariat. This rift affected various levels of the UN hierarchy's philosophical outlook on the war. Different perspectives--principally in theory and in practice--between the Secretariat and Council caused these cleavages.

The Security Council as a whole was the strongest advocate of the efficacy of the safe areas policy at the time of the Srebrenica crisis in April 1993. Within the Security Council, both France and

Britain--two of the biggest troop contributors to the UNPROFOR effort on the ground--strongly supported the proposed plan. Furthermore, as permanent representatives of the Council, both Paris and London represented their European neighbors and their collective concerns regarding the UN's policy toward Bosnia. At the same time, the US "made no secret of their ambivalence about the safe haven proposal and remained in the background."<sup>46</sup>

After Washington failed to gain European support for its "lift and strike" policy (an initiative this author will address in chapter four), Washington opted for a more conciliatory approach for the sake of allied unity.<sup>47</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the safe area vote (UNSCR 836), US Ambassador Madeleine Albright said, "The United States voted for this resolution with no illusions. It is an immediate step--no more, no less."<sup>48</sup> Later, however, the US took a more assertive role in regards to the safe areas and used it to leverage US policy initiatives. In chapter four, this author will discuss at length the effects of US policy on the UN's safe area policy.

With an over-arching institutional responsibility for the "maintenance of international peace and security," the Security Council generally forms policy decisions to meet these ends.<sup>49</sup> However, one of the fundamental flaws in the system is that "the Security Council makes decisions to intervene not to objective criteria but rather to what the international political traffic will bear."<sup>50</sup> In other words, the Council's decision process is based on institutional compromise, which inherently leads not to the most practical solution to a stated problem.

With this process in mind, once the Security Council renders a decision, then the responsibility of translating the concept into an executable operation passes to the auspices of the Secretary General. That is, the Secretariat is responsible for all "operational matters . . . and the direction of these operations" with respect to the peacekeeping mission of the ground.<sup>51</sup> In this vein, the UN Secretariat interpreted its principal mission as facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in need and to help broker a peace. The concept of neutrality was at the focal point of all decisions and actions. In a speech to the Security Council in October 1993, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali again reiterated, "The United Nations cannot impose peace; the role of the United

Nations is to maintain peace."<sup>52</sup> But at the same time, the Security Council trumpeted its explicit authorization for the blue helmets to use "all measures necessary" to enforce the safe area mandate.<sup>53</sup>

In spite of the Security Council's euphoria over the safe area plan, the Secretary General's office released the details of a "working paper" in June of 1993 that stated "the concept of safe areas is virtually impossible to implement" without a cease fire.<sup>54</sup> The Secretary General tried to articulate to the Security Council that enforcing the safe area mandates was problematic. In essence, the Secretary General argued that the plan lacked clearly defined objectives and adequate force structure. The peacekeeping planners under his organization estimated that the plan would require 3,000 to 10,000 troops in a best case scenario; the worst case scenario, on the other hand, would require 34,000 additional troops. But only two countries, Pakistan and Russia, offered additional troops. Compounding the problem, as David Rieff observed, "the Security Council kept ordering the peacekeepers to do difficult and ambitious things, but then rarely were they willing to back up these new mandates with even the minimal amounts of money and manpower that they required."<sup>55</sup> In effect, a conflict over means and ends emerged between the Security Council and Secretary General. It is quite clear that the Secretary General (and UNPROFOR on the ground) did not fully endorse the idea of safe areas.

One year after the safe area mandate was in effect and immediately after the Gorazde safe area crisis of April 1994 (which led to the most serious challenge to the safe area's legitimacy), the Secretary-General issued a report to the Security Council. The report (dated 9 May) stated that the success of the concept required three over-arching principles:

That the intention of safe areas is primarily to protect people and not to defend territory and that UNPROFOR's protection of these areas is not intended to make it a party to the conflict. That the method of execution of the safe areas task should not, if possible, detract from, but rather enhance, UNPROFOR's original mandates in Bosnia, namely supporting humanitarian assistance operations and contributing to the overall peace process . . . . That the mandate must take into account UNPROFOR's resource limitations and the conflicting priorities that inevitably arise from unfolding events.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond these desired principles, the Secretary-General also recommended to the Security Council that the UNPROFOR "mission in relation to the safe areas be clearly defined . . . that the safe areas be delineated . . . and that they be respected."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the Secretary-General reiterated again the



"temporary" nature of the safe area concept and the desire that these safe areas "provide a positive contribution to the peace process, and not to detract from it."<sup>58</sup>

Ironically, one year after this report, in May 1995 (just before events of the ground led to the stepped-up NATO air campaign during the summer of 1995), the Secretary General again addressed the inadequacies of the safe area policy. In this report, he admitted "UNPROFOR's ability to carry out its safe-area mandate and particularly to deter deliberate attacks on the areas has been severely limited by the inherent deficiencies of the safe-area regime, to which I have more than once drawn the Council's attention, and by the military activities of the two sides."<sup>59</sup> As the language suggests, the Secretary-General emphatically pointed out his concerns in reference to the problems "inherent" with the safe area concepts and the Security Council's insufficient manner in dealing with these problems.

In summary, this chapter examined why the UN initiated the safe area concept, the institutional decision making process that resulted in the policy, and the host of the inherent contradictions in this policy toward facilitating the over-arching goal of bringing conflict resolution to Bosnia. The last point quoted above, meanwhile, serves as a way to introduce the next chapter; that is, how the "military activities of the two sides" affected the safe area policy.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Weiss, "UN Responses in the Former Yugoslavia: Moral and Operational Choices," Ethics and International Affairs, 8, (Winter 1994): 6.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Kinzer, "Dutch Conscience Stung by Troops' Bosnia Failure," The New York Times, (8 October 1995): A-1.

<sup>3</sup>Woodward, 307.

<sup>4</sup>Reiff, 169.

<sup>5</sup>Duffield, 16.

<sup>6</sup>Mark R. Seastrom, "What Strategic Considerations Should Affect A Decision by U.S. to Intervene in Bosnia-Hercegovina?," Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, (7 October 1995): 91.

<sup>7</sup>Woodward, 295.

<sup>8</sup>"The Search for a Safe Haven in the Kingdom of Death," The Economist, (21 November, 1992): 59.

<sup>9</sup>Duffield, 20.

<sup>10</sup>Gunter, 55.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>12</sup>John M. Kelley, "Tactical Implications for Peacemaking in Ethnic Conflict," Fort Leavenworth, United States Army Command and General Staff College, (25 March 1993): 13.

<sup>13</sup>Reiff, 169.

<sup>14</sup>United Nations Protection Force Information Sheet, September 1994, 11.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>18</sup>United Nations Document, Resolution 824 (1993), 6 May 1993.

<sup>19</sup>United Nations Document, "Report of the Security Council Mission Established Pursuant to Resolution 819 (1993)," S/25700, 30 April 1993, 6.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>22</sup>United Nations Department of Public Information, "UN and the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia, 15 March 1994, 15.

<sup>23</sup>United Nations Document: Report to the Secretary General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 982, May 1995, 13.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>27</sup>United Nations Documents, Resolution 836 (1993), 4 June 1993, 1.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>29</sup>Rieff, 173.

<sup>30</sup>UN Document S/25800, "French Memorandum Relative to Safe Areas," 19 May 1993, 4.

<sup>31</sup>UN Chronicle, "Fighting Escalates, UN Role in Question," XXXII, no. 3, (September 1995): 29.

<sup>32</sup>United States GAO, "Humanitarian Intervention: Effectiveness of UN Operations in Bosnia," (April 1994): 3.

<sup>33</sup>Lewis Mackenzie, "Tragic Errors," Macleans, (12 December 1994): 35.

<sup>34</sup>Vladimir Abarinov, "No One to Carry Out Resolution on Protecting Safe Areas," The Current Digest, XLV, no. 23, (7 July 1993): 20.

<sup>35</sup>UN Document S/25800, "French Memorandum Relative to Safe Areas," 19 May 1993, 2.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>38</sup>United Nations Document: Report to the Secretary General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 982, (May 1995): 21.

<sup>39</sup>Weiss, 3.

<sup>40</sup>Mackenzie, 36.

<sup>41</sup>Torsten Orn, "Peacekeeping--The New Challenges," International Relations, XII, no. 5, (August 1995): 6.

<sup>42</sup>UN Document, "French Memorandum Relative to Safe Areas," S/25800, 19 May 95, 2.

<sup>43</sup>UN Document, UNSCR 836, 3.

<sup>44</sup>(S/PRST/1994/14 and 57)" Sec Gen. report 30 May 1995, 14.

<sup>45</sup>Michael Rose, "A Year in Bosnia: What Has Been Accomplished?" RUSI Journal, (June 1995): 22.

<sup>46</sup>Julia Preston, "Safe Haven Proposal Under Siege at UN," New York Times, (3 June 1993): A21.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., A21.

<sup>48</sup>Julia Preston, "UN Orders Troops for Bosnian Safe Havens," New York Times, (5 June 1993): A16.

<sup>49</sup>The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations Publication, 1990, 6.

<sup>50</sup>Weiss, 4.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>54</sup>Preston, A21.

<sup>55</sup>Rieff, 173.

<sup>56</sup>United Nations Document: Report to the Secretary General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 982, (May 1995): 22.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 21.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE WARRING FACTIONS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE SAFE AREAS

From the very beginning of the fighting, the Izetbegovic government's strategy was to try to get the West to intervene militarily.<sup>1</sup>

David Rieff, Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West

As stated earlier, even though the civil war in Bosnia was multi-sided between three principal factions, this thesis will focus on the Muslim versus Serb fighting. In broad terms, the course of this civil war was fought in three distinct stages: first, Muslim versus Bosnian Serb (1993); second, Muslim versus Bosnian Croats in central Bosnia (mid 1993 to early 1994); last, Muslim versus Bosnian Serb (mid early 1994 until the fall of 1995). Despite the brutal character of Muslim versus Croat conflict in central Bosnia throughout most of 1993, the Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims stopped fighting each other with the advent of the Washington Federation Agreement in February of 1994. For all practical purposes, the two erstwhile enemies became nominal allies with this agreement. Subsequently, the nature of the war changed once again; that is, the "multi-sidedness" of the war now transformed into essentially a war of Bosnian Muslims against the Bosnian Serbs. Notwithstanding the small minority of Croats living within and around the Bihac and Sarajevo safe areas, the safe areas were essentially set up to protect the Muslim populace against Bosnian Serb attacks. It stands to reason, therefore, that this chapter will focus on the varying aspects of the Muslim versus Serb fighting pertaining to the safe areas.

The warring factions (principally the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims) developed starkly different views and interpretations of the safe area policy. Their asymmetrical military capabilities and composition of their forces were perhaps the most significant determinants in forming these views. When the safe area policy was mandated in April 1993, the troop strengths for the

Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats were 120,000, 80,000, and 40,000 respectively.<sup>2</sup> Although the Muslims were poorly equipped and trained compared to the Serbs and Croats in the early stages of the war, their superior troop strength contributed significantly to their overall combat power. The Serbs clearly had an overwhelming superiority in mechanized forces and in heavy weapons (artillery and tanks) as well as in a trained officer corps.<sup>3</sup> However, because of the severely restrictive terrain throughout Bosnia, the capabilities of mechanized forces were significantly degraded; conversely, the capabilities of light infantry or irregular forces were markedly increased.

In order to understand the Bosnian Serb military perspective in the conflict, it is essential to understand the Bosnian Serb political goals. From the outset of the war, the Bosnian Serbs declared their determination not to live under a political, economic, and social system dominated by a Muslim led Government in Sarajevo. When 64 percent of the Bosnians voted for secession and independence from rump-Yugoslavia in March 1992 (a referendum that the Bosnian Serbs boycotted), the Bosnian Serbs reacted by proclaiming a "Serbian-Bosnian Republic [Republic of Srbska] that claimed 60-65 percent of the country's territory."<sup>4</sup> The over-arching political goal of Pale (the newly self-proclaimed capital of the Republic of Srbska) was to gain control of the predominately Serb held areas in Bosnia and Hercegovina and to link this contiguous state to a loose confederation with rump-Yugoslavia (or Serbia proper). In essence, because the revolt was initiated from within Bosnia, the conflict took on the characteristics of a civil war. But since the newly formed BSA was essentially organized from former JNA forces who hailed from Bosnia, many officials, journalists, and pundits emotionally argued that the conflict was essentially a war of aggression centrally directed from Belgrade. It is not the intent of this thesis to argue in support of one position over the other. However, for organizational purposes and because more evidence suggests the conflict was passionately borne out of distinct differences from how Bosnians (all ethnic groups living within Bosnia-Hercegovina) envisioned their political, economic, and social livelihood and future, this thesis will treat the conflict as a civil war.

From a military perspective, the BSA developed a three part strategy to defeat the Bosnian Government.<sup>5</sup> First, with predominately irregular forces with support from their regular forces, the Bosnian Serbs employed the tactic of ethnic cleansing to expand and consolidate their gains; second,

they launched conventional attacks with their regular military forces to keep the initiative and expand their control of two-thirds of Bosnia's territory; last, the Bosnian Serbs employed the tactic of siege warfare to "terrorize the population and undermine the legitimacy of the government."<sup>6</sup> In an effort to take advantage of their military strengths and minimize their weaknesses--principally a distinct advantage in heavy weapons and a shortage of infantry--this employment of indirect fires against towns in an effort to demoralize and dislodge the population became a centerpiece of the BSA strategy over time.<sup>7</sup> The BSA had an estimated 5:1 strength advantage in heavy weapons (tanks and artillery). By employing the tactic of incessant shelling coupled with the deprivation of basic foodstuffs, the BSA estimated that they could achieve their desired ends of ethnically cleansed territorial holdings.<sup>8</sup> That is, the tactics of siege warfare became integral to the Serb strategy to defeat the Muslim army. In essence, the besieged populations within the enclaves and elsewhere became the "target of violence and the center of gravity of the" BSA.<sup>9</sup>

In the early stages of the war, this siege warfare--coupled with the conduct of the irregular forces--proved to be an effective way to force the Muslim population to displace. Once the populations moved from their town of origin, e.g., Zvornik, Brcko, Foca, the areas became ethnically cleansed of all Muslims. Unfortunately for the Serbs, once the safe areas policy was adopted, this siege warfare worked at cross purposes of the humanitarian effort and the terms of the safe area mandate. In essence, the safe area policy put the brakes on further population transfers and thus neutralized the Serb tactic of siege warfare.

The use of irregular forces facilitated the Bosnian Serb strategy of ethnic cleansing. Based on the evidence, it appears most of these nationalist forces originated from Serbia proper. Those who carried out the preponderance of ethnic cleansing were collectively referred to as "Chetniks" (historically linked to the Serbian nationalists who supported the ousted Monarch during World War Two). Their "tactics" of intimidation, murder and rape were designed to cause terror and panic within the Muslim community and thereby induce the Muslim populace to flee from these vulnerable areas. The Bosnia Serbs solicited the support of Chetniks for ethnic cleansing operations because local troops were generally unwilling to perpetrate this type of tactic against their former neighbors.<sup>10</sup>

The Serb practice of ethnic cleansing, although tragic and unpalatable, is not a new tactic of war.<sup>11</sup> According to Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, "population removal and transfer have occurred in history more often than is generally acknowledged."<sup>12</sup> Even though a fine line exists in the technical distinction between ethnic cleansing and a voluntary exodus, the media has reported all population transfers in Bosnia in terms of the more sensational characterization. Both historically speaking and in a modern context, generally when enemy forces seized populated areas, the population usually would flee because of the heightened fears associated with a conquering force. For example, when Jace, in central Bosnian, fell in October of 1992, 25,000 Muslims fled to the Muslim controlled town of Travnik; at the outset of the war in eastern Croatia (Slavonia region) 20,000 Serbs "voluntarily" moved to Serbia.<sup>13</sup> Technically speaking, these two examples do not meet the definition of ethnic cleansing.

Regarding the situation around the safe areas (and specifically the eastern enclaves), however, it is clear the Bosnian Serb regular and irregular forces tried to ethnically cleanse--to varying degrees of success--the remaining pockets of Muslim civilians and forces that intermingled in these pockets. However, with the promise of the UN to protect the safe areas, the Bosnian Serb's use of artillery and tanks to shell the besieged areas in an attempt to affect the will of the Bosnian populace now had diminished effects.<sup>14</sup> With the advantage of hindsight, it now seems that the Bosnian Serbs miscalculated the Muslim's will to indefinitely hold out and the level of support the international community was willing to expend on this untenable situation. On the other hand, although the Clinton Administration balked on its Lift and Strike policy and sending ground forces to Bosnia to defend Muslim interest, the constant rhetoric emanating from the White House and Congress undeniably provided the Muslims with the false hope of a US led intervention. That is, with this image of a Western cavalry looming just over the horizon, the Muslims were psychologically motivated to hold on. In relation to this phenomenon, Robert Tucker and David Henderickson wrote: "The United States both encouraged the Muslims to take the step that led toward war, and then subsequently abandoned them once the war broke out."<sup>15</sup> George Kenney observed in 1994, that despite the



Muslims inadequate means and untenable situation, the "US encouraged them to keep fighting."<sup>16</sup> The effects of US policy in relationship to the safe areas will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

The Bosnian-Herzegovina Army, collectively referred to as the BiH, became a predominately ethnic Muslim army with the secession of the Bosnian Serbs. The BiH was principally "derived from the old territorial defense units which were organized into 'opstina' (county) brigades" under the military system established under the leadership of Marshal Tito.<sup>17</sup> These territorial defense forces were organized and equipped to provide decentralized small unit military operations in the event of a large scale invasion. Although some volunteers came from the professional ranks of the former Yugoslavian People's Army (JNA), the BiH took on the character of a citizens' militia. Because of the Bosnian Army's territorial defense structure and their inherent military limitations, most combat operations were organized at brigade and lower levels. Initially, the BiH employed the tactics of small unit raids, delays, and sniper attacks to disrupt BSA operations.<sup>18</sup> Over time, with increased manpower and weapons and better organization, training and experience, the Muslims conducted multi-brigade level operations to some degree of success. After two years of practical combat experience, coupled with "The increasing supply of light weapons and some heavier artillery, improved leadership, and the adoption of guerrilla techniques" the BiH transformed into more capable military force.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the arrival of displaced individuals from ethnically cleansed areas contributed markedly to the BiH combat power. The ranks of the BiH swelled from about 50,000 in 1993 to over 120,000 in late 1994. In part, the growth of the BiH force structure was in direct relationship to the flow of displaced persons into central Bosnia. These displaced individuals were integrated into the BiH forces to form mobile brigades. Since these displaced individuals had a strong incentive to fight, i.e. to regain their lost homes and territory, they became an effective combat multiplier.<sup>20</sup> And, with a nothing to lose and everything to gain psyche, these soldiers were willing to serve as the spearhead for many attacks.

As the BiH matured into a formidable army in relationship to the BSA, they also became "particularly adept at using force to provoke attacks, which they later used for political purposes."<sup>21</sup>

This tactic, as this thesis will point out, would eventually prove to be the Achilles' heel of the safe area policy. That is, the safe area policy did not address the prospects of the Muslims converting these safe areas into military strong points and bases of combat operations. Furthermore, the initial UN presence around these safe areas--although not robust--provided minimum security in thwarting full scale BSA assaults on these areas. The safe areas not only protected the noncombatants, but they also protected a significant portion of the Bosnian military machine. In fact, of the six designated Bosnian corps headquarters, three were located within the safe area's boundaries (I Corps in Sarajevo, II Corps in Tuzla, and V Corps in Bihac).

Later in early 1994, after the Croats and Muslims agreed to form a federation based on the Washington Agreement, the combined troop strength of the federation grew to about 200,000 soldiers. Even though the Federation partners did not fight as a combined or joint force until the spring of 1995, the agreement had an immediate effect on the military balance of power. With a relative calm between the erstwhile enemies, the Muslims were able to shift a considerable amount of their infantry force away from the former confrontation line against the Croats and directly commit these forces against the BSA. Moreover, two fundamental realities hamstrung the Serb's military operations from this point forward: first, with insufficient manpower--particularly in their infantry forces--the BSA's operational lines became increasingly over-stretched; secondly, the Bosnian Serbs were forced to operate on exterior lines of communications. Based on these exterior lines, the BSA could not move or resupply their forces rapidly.<sup>22</sup> With these limitations in mind and with most of their war aims met in the early stages of the conflict, the Bosnia Serbs adopted a strategic defensive plan. Pale planned to sustain this strategy until their political demands could be met. Notwithstanding the advantages of a defensive posture, the Bosnian Serb's insufficient force strength and disadvantage of exterior lines precluded them from effectively defending the breadth and depth of the existing confrontation line.

The Federation Agreement also opened up the flow of arms from Croatia proper into the interior of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Prior to the agreement, Bosnia was isolated. In the early stages of the war (with the fighting between the Bosnian Croats and the Muslims coupled with this landlocked situation), it was difficult for second or third parties to transfer arms to the Muslims.

However, the Federation Agreement facilitated the transshipment of arms. In spite of the Muslim's need for heavy weapons, almost all the arms transferred were light or crew-served weapons.

The situation changed even more dramatically with adoption of the safe area policy. With this new policy in effect, the Bosnians initiated a strategy of launching simultaneous attacks at critical points. This strategy was designed to keep the Bosnian Serbs off balance and to expose weaknesses in their defensive posture. On the one hand, through most of 1993 and 1994, the Bosnians were unsuccessful in capitalizing on the BSA's weakness because of inadequacies in three key areas: heavy weapons, logistics system, and command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the Bosnians "did not expect a rapid or decisive liberation but have launched a prolonged strategy that is bound to encounter setbacks. Flexibility and surprise will continue to be the principal tactic, designed to wear down Serb resistance."<sup>24</sup>

However, with the massive UN humanitarian effort already underway, now coupled with the Security Council expansion of the mandate, the Serbs were essentially prevented from conducting further offensive operations to strike their operational objectives. As a direct result of the safe area policy, in spite of their marked advantage of heavy weapons, the Serbs' strategy to defeat the Bosnians was neutralized. Large areas of Bosnia were administratively removed from the Serbs' strategic campaign plan. As a consequence, the Serbs lost the military and political initiative in the conflict. With the initiative lost, the military tide of the war gradually changed to favor the Bosnians. Wherever the Serbs applied military pressure, they would inevitably run into a UN operation or UN restrictive measures overlaid on the battlefield that would alter or preclude their intended operation.

In essence, in the middle of the conflict, the Security Council emasculated the Bosnian Serbs ability to apply the art of war against their enemy. On the other hand, the Muslims were given cart blanche to conduct military operations without the fear of failure. The UN Security Council handed the Muslims a "win-win" situation. If they attacked from the newly declared safe areas and gained ground, the international community turned a blind eye to the technical violations of the safe area mandate and applauded their efforts. If, on the other hand, their attacks were unsuccessful, the UN

was now obliged to intervene to prevent a serious failure of any Muslim military operation. Under the terms of the safe area mandate, "neither the existence of the Bosnian state nor its control over the core of its territory can be seriously jeopardized without provoking a sharp international response."<sup>25</sup> As the strategic and tactical momentum of the war shifted toward Sarajevo's side, a near term peace solution seemed unlikely.

With a stalled diplomatic process (Vance-Owen Peace Process or VOPP), which was intrinsically linked to the new favorable conditions emerging for the Muslims, a stalemated political situation arose. The Bosnian Serbs could not militarily leverage the process because they could only operate under the principles of attrition, and the humanitarian aid effort buoyed up the Muslims, which reduced the effects of the Bosnian Serb's attrition strategy. The UN now faced yet another dilemma: the safe area mandate was "temporarily" setup to facilitate the diplomatic process; however, with the UN now guaranteeing the Muslim Government territorial integrity within these six safe areas, the Muslims were less willing to negotiate in good faith and more willing to prosecute the war militarily to regain territory. That is, the Sarajevo government believed they could gain more through military action than diplomatic means.

Traditionally, in the absence of peace coupled with a stalemated diplomatic process, warring parties would normally continue to fight until a culmination point was reached on the battlefield. Decisive battles or campaigns were fought to directly affect the political process. But war as a "continuation of politics" took on an entirely new meaning in this age of UN managed conflict. In this modern quasi-state of war (where there was no peace nor war), the entire dynamics of the conflict changed. The Bosnian Serbs could not wage war beyond a threshold level that offended the standards of the Security Council; in contrast, the Muslims were buffered from the horrors of annihilation and thus emboldened to believe they could regain more territory through military means versus diplomatic means. Further, as the United States policy became more bellicose in its overt support of the Muslims, the Bosnians became increasingly emboldened in their political and military outlook. In essence, because neither side was willing to negotiate a settlement in good faith, further prosecution of the war was inevitable. But with the safe area policy now in effect, the UN shackled the BSA's

military options while simultaneously inviting new Muslim military options. In short, both time and initiative were now on the Muslim side.

So, while the Bosnian Serbs adopted a strategic defensive and intended to lay siege on the safe areas to force their ultimate demise, the humanitarian effort stepped in to buoy this otherwise untenable situation for the Muslims. As the UN continued to tout its impartial stance in the conflict, hundreds of tons of support of humanitarian aid became the life support of these besieged safe areas. The unhindered movement of humanitarian aid thwarted the Bosnian Serb strategy of siege warfare; consequently, the UN's delivery of aid to the safe areas was perceived by the Bosnian Serbs as defying the peacekeeping tenet of neutrality and directly interfering with their war aims.<sup>26</sup> From a modern western context, siege warfare is clearly unpalatable. However, to much of the world, including the Balkan nations, siege warfare is a legitimate military enterprise. General Mladic, the military commander of the Bosnian Serbs, told UNHCR officials that if the Muslim populace did not withdraw from the eastern enclaves, he would starve them out.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, General Mladic made it perfectly clear to the UNHCR that he had no "objection to the UNHCR feeding [his] enemy in areas the Serbs did not covet."<sup>28</sup> Lieutenant General Rose aptly observed that "inevitably all sides will use humanitarian aid itself for political and military ends. Even the delivery by the UN of basic foodstuffs to a besieged population will be considered as a hostile act by those carrying out the siege operation."<sup>29</sup>

Quite understandably, the delivery of humanitarian aid to areas where the factions were fighting became one of the more contentious issues of the war. Because of the terrain restrictions, supply routes were among the most valued operational objectives of the warring factions' strategy; moreover, because these routes were important to the UN effort as well, a conflict over control of these routes arose between the warring factions (principally the Bosnian Serbs) and the UN humanitarian effort.<sup>30</sup> Although this aid was intended to support the needy civilian sector, it invariably landed in the laps of the combatants. "Humanitarian aid may be prolonging the war . . . all sides steal from the convoys that move through their areas . . . with the rest of the world feeding their civilian populations, the warring parties are free to concentrate on military matters."<sup>31</sup> Because most of the humanitarian aid was earmarked for Muslim held areas, it gave the Bosnian Government a decided advantage over

their enemy--an enemy that was increasingly feeling the effects of the UN imposed sanctions on Serbia proper. Bosnian Serbs often complained of the US led airdrops into the safe areas. UN sources reported that US air-dropped MREs (meals ready to eat) often ended up in the hands of the Bosnian soldiers launching attacks from these safe areas.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the media coverage of the war was decidedly in favor of the Muslims. From the outset of the war, the press and the Izetbegovic government developed a symbiotic relationship. Moreover, Sarajevo clearly understood the power of the media and harnessed this power to promote their cause. As the war continued unabated, "the role of the media in the conflict assumed ever-greater proportions."<sup>33</sup> For all intents and purposes, the press coverage has universally depicted the Bosnian Serbs as the aggressor and the Muslims as the innocent victims. This victimization status "has been a jealously protected tool of war."<sup>34</sup> Arguably, notwithstanding the markedly improved Bosnian military capabilities and wherewithal in late 1994 and 95, the media became the most successful weapon of the Muslim government.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, while the Muslims leveraged the media to support its cause, the Bosnian Serbs developed an inherent distrust of the media's reporting and thus alienated them from the outset.<sup>36</sup>

The Bosnian Government adeptly exploited the "CNN-effect"--the increasing globalization of instant news communication and its affects on the sentimentalities of the viewer<sup>37</sup>--to force policy-makers to directly confront the situation. As Susan Woodward noted, "Whenever attention to Bosnia's plight lagged, the government provoked incidents around Sarajevo and other safe areas."<sup>38</sup> The Bosnian Serb's tactic of terror shelling to demoralize the population and thwart Muslim infantry attacks played into the hands of the Bosnian Government.<sup>39</sup> With virtually the entire press corps situated on the Muslim side of the confrontation line, the Muslims were given instantaneous world wide coverage both of their plight and the barbarity of Serb tactics. General Rose wrote the following about the media's powerful effect on peacekeeping operations:

What is reported and seen on TV directly affects policies being developed abroad as well as attitudes within the country. If the media falsely show images of war, exaggerates facts or distort opinions, there is of course a very real danger that international policy will become based on propaganda and rhetoric rather than on practicality and reality.<sup>40</sup>

A mortar round that impacted in a crowded Sarajevo market place in February 1994, became the emblematic example of the CNN-effect directly impacting international opinion. The vivid real-time images of dozens of mangled bodies televised worldwide emboldened the UN and NATO to threaten air strikes to enforce the safe area concept in Sarajevo. In spite of the controversy that emerged over the shell's origin of fire and the unevaluated nature of the information available, the UN and NATO were forced to move quickly to give an air of doing something in the face of such shocking television footage beamed world wide. See chapter four for more discussion on the impact of this mortar attack.

Based on the Bosnians particularly favorable situation with the safe areas mandate coupled with their distinct advantage in securing the media's sympathies, the Muslims launched numerous provocative attacks from the politically and military sensitive safe areas. These attacks were designed to exploit the BSA's penchant for overreacting to seemingly minor infringements upon their territorial holdings. Once the Serbs began their counterattacks, the Muslims would instantaneously challenge the international community to uphold the safe area agreement. Moreover, whenever and wherever the Bosnian Serbs responded to the Muslim provocations, they would receive bad press--which further alienated them from the diplomatic process--and further condemnation from the Security Council.

Although dozens of Muslim provocations are fully documented, the following three examples are particularly instructive in showing the Muslim skill in fomenting the situation around the safe areas and the crafting of high profile crisis to garner international attention. These three examples (illustrated below) were all carried out within a span of seven months in 1994. Additionally, all three led to direct NATO intervention against BSA forces around the safe areas.

In the first example, the BiH initiated small scale breakout attacks south of the Gorazde safe area in March 1994. The aim of these attacks was to interdict the BSA supply lines south of Gorazde that linked the Serb held towns of Foca to Cajnice and foment a Serb overreaction to these provocations. Within the confines of Gorazde, there were about 65,000 Muslims at the time, of which about 8,000 were armed and organized into the BiH military structure.<sup>41</sup> Again, these attacks were launched directly from the confines of the safe area proper. By the end of the month, the BSA moved heavy weapons south of the city to secure the contested route, counterattack Muslim forces south of

the Drina River, and to shell Gorazde town, which was serving as a Muslim base of operations. From a military perspective, these BSA counteractions to defeat the Muslim forces seemed perfectly legitimate and justifiable. After the Bosnian Serbs collapsed the Muslim defenses south of Gorazde, they shelled the town and moved some tanks across the Drina River into the safe area. At this point, NATO issued an ultimatum for the BSA to halt their offensive because it was reportedly endangering the lives of innocent civilians within the enclave. Since the BSA attack continued within the safe area in spite of the ultimatum, NATO launched air strikes against BSA targets on 10 and 11 April. The two sorties reportedly hit the Serb targets (reportedly a tank and an APC), but proved to be ineffectual in stopping the attack.<sup>42</sup> When a NATO aircraft was shot down during a subsequent air strike on 16 April, the UN hastily brokered a cease-fire to end the crisis.<sup>43</sup>

In the aftermath of the battle, the senior UN Military Observer (UNMO), Dutch Brigadier General Bastiaans stated that "the Muslims provoked the Serbs with shooting and harassment to such a point they had little option other than using their heavy weapons."<sup>44</sup> In an interview with French TV (TF-1), General Rose acknowledged that he asked the Bosnians to cease their provocations; furthermore, he said that these provocations on the Serbs were designed to "set up the pressure and to obtain fresh intervention from NATO."<sup>45</sup> In a fitting metaphor related to these provocations, Bruce Wallace described the Gorazde situation as a "large Muslim population in the heart of Serbian territory [that] acts as a kind of red flag to a bull."<sup>46</sup>

In the next example, on 18 September 1994, the BiH launched an extensive mortar barrage and limited ground attack on the BSA held positions in the northern Sarajevo suburb of Sedrenik. This attack was launched from within the designated safe area of Sarajevo. The UN characterized this attack as the most significant fighting in six months within and around Sarajevo. Even though this Muslim attack was in direct violation of the Sarajevo TEZ and safe area mandate, international condemnation and press reporting of the attack were muted. The UN counterbattery ground radar stationed with the city registered 250-300 mortar rounds that afternoon.<sup>47</sup> It was later revealed that the Muslims had fired the preponderance of these rounds.<sup>48</sup> With the heightened tensions in the area of Sedrenik immediately following the attack, the UN attempted to move additional French



Peacekeepers the next day in an effort to defuse the situation. But the Bosnian Serbs grew increasingly recalcitrant as a result of the attack and prevented the movement of the French into the politically and sensitive area of Sedrenik. On 22 September, the French and BSA standoff culminated when the BSA fired a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) at a French armored personnel carrier (APC) along the confrontation line. Subsequently, the UN approved and launched a retaliatory NATO air strike against a Serb tank within the Sarajevo TEZ.<sup>49</sup> Following the NATO air strike, the Serbs initiated a two-week blockade on all humanitarian deliveries to Sarajevo and cutback the city's utilities.<sup>50</sup> As a result of this blockade of humanitarian aid and utilities, the BSA received yet another round of media and UN condemnations.

The sequence of events detailed above began with a well-crafted Muslim provocation designed to elicit an aggressive Serb counteraction. A counteraction that the Muslims calculated would ultimately yield a stiff NATO response to the BSA transgressions within the Sarajevo safe area. Even though the NATO response was limited, the Bosnian government believed that they were one step closer toward getting NATO to unleash its airpower against the Bosnian Serbs. Interestingly, the Muslim attack on the 18th was initiated on the eve of the US planned invasion of Haiti. With the US preoccupied with this invasion, the Izetbegovic government insidiously timed the attack to limit any potential backlash of criticism. After a relatively uneventful summer (the VOPP was scuttled and the Contact Group's initiatives were stalled) and with US decision makers focused on the situation in Haiti, it appears the Muslims needed to craft an incident to remind Western governments of the tenuous and festering situation in Bosnia.

In the last example, in October of 1994, the Bosnian V Corps--which was headquartered within the safe area of Bihac--launched a multi-brigade offensive into Bosnian Serb held areas south and east of the Bihac safe area. Within days (largely because the BSA forces were over-stretched and committed elsewhere) the Muslims seized several hundred square kilometers of Bosnian Serb held areas. The attack was so successful that Bosnia's Prime Minister, Haris Silajdzic, touted publicly that the momentum of the war was now on the Bosnia's [Muslim] side.<sup>51</sup> However, after the BSA transferred forces from eastern Bosnia and Serb held areas in Croatia (the Krajina region), they

counterattacked and pushed the Muslims back to the original confrontation line by mid-November. Next, in an effort to neutralize the V Corps offensive striking capabilities, the BSA pressured the V Corps Headquarters in downtown Bihac with both direct and indirect fires. These attacks, although directed against legitimate military targets, were in direct violation of the safe area mandate. Not surprisingly, as General Boyd observed,

During the counterattack the Bosnian Government and many in the international community demanded that the UN and NATO protect the Bihac safe area from Serb aggression. A common theme was the impending humanitarian catastrophe if strong steps were not taken--even though this was a fight that the Muslim army had picked. The Bosnian Government actions were clearly orchestrated to create the conditions for NATO air strikes.<sup>52</sup>

Because of the controversy over the attack and the image of a humanitarian disaster impending, a hotly contested row emerged within the Security Council. On one hand, the US led a coalition that believed 170,000 Muslim civilians living in the pocket were at grave risk from the continued BSA attack; on the other hand, the French led a group of European nations that opposed a NATO response to protect the Bihac Muslims because they believed the "Serb counterattack was a legitimate military maneuver to regain lost ground."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the official UN spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Spicer, said: "We are not here to aid the strategic aims of one side over the other. They [the BiH] made an ambitious attack without properly calculating the Serb response."<sup>54</sup> Although the US openly admitted the Bosnian Government initiated the attacks that created the crisis around the Bihac safe area, Madeline Albright, the US Ambassador to the UN, couched the Bosnian attacks as perfectly justifiable. In her speech to elicit NATO air strikes to stem the BSA advance, she stated:

I know there are those who condemn the Bosnian Government for its recent attacks on the Bosnia Serbs forces in parts of central and western Bosnia. My government regrets all continued fighting. But let us not confuse attacks made to recover territory lost to aggression, with aggression itself.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond the immediate situation unfolding in Bihac and based on this argument, it seems apparent that the US was applying a double standard to the safe area regime and to the conflict in general. On the one hand, it can be argued that this double standard was understandable from the perspective that the Muslim led Bosnian government was a UN recognized member state; on the other hand, this rationale rejected the very real evidence that indicated this conflict was indeed a civil war. Although Ambassador Albright did not clarify what she meant by the word "aggression," this author

gleaned from the literature that she was referring to external influences from Belgrade on the nature on the conflict.

The Muslims were allowed to attack with impunity while the Serbs were unequivocally condemned for their military operations. Also, in a more damaging precedent, the US was implicitly giving the Muslims the green light to launch further attacks to "recover territory lost to aggression."

Of course, these statements directly contradicted the Contact Group's peace process effort as well. Again, this author will examine the affects of US and NATO policy in regards to the safe areas in more detail in chapter four.

In evaluating these Bosnian Muslim attacks carried out from the safe areas, three common themes are evident: first, all three were designed to elicit direct international involvement to the Muslim's cause; all the attacks led directly to NATO air strikes against BSA targets. Even though NATO's responses to all of these attacks seemed commensurate with the level of BSA transactions, the Muslims pressured its supporters in the UN to step up the scale and lethality of the NATO strikes.

With each new BSA attack in or around the safe areas, the Muslims were able to enlist further supporters to their endeavor of getting a more robust NATO response the next time the BSA crossed the boundary of a safe area. Second, each attack rekindled diplomatic haggling among the European and American officials who were trying to solve the problem. With each attack the international community, principally the Security Council, was forced to reexamine their ineffectual policy toward conflict resolution in Bosnia. Invariably, each new examination led to yet another resolution. These resolutions, in turn, led to further peacekeeping mission creep. Thirdly, each attack made the Bosnian Serbs even more intransigent with the peace process and isolated from the international community. Also, each attack led to further Serb retribution against the humanitarian mission in the aftermath of NATO air strikes. Generally, the Bosnian Serbs would cut back their authorization of humanitarian aid to Muslim held areas. It would seem, the Muslims understood that these attacks would have a direct effect on the amount of aid that would be allowed to move to their own people in the safe areas. This of course led to further erosion of the humanitarian situation in the safe areas.

In summary, this chapter provided background for an analysis of how the safe areas directly affected the warring factions and how they ironically led to further destabilization in Bosnia based on warring faction posturing. The Bihac situation described above provides an ideal transition into the next chapter—"The Effects of US and NATO policy on the Safe Areas." That is, the Bihac crisis in part was a manifestation of how US policy (and by extension NATO policy) affected the safe area policy, the very nature of the war and undermined the peace process.

## Endnotes

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<sup>5</sup>Jacob W. Kipp and Timothy L. Thomas, "International Ramifications of Yugoslavia's Serial Wars: The Challenge of Ethno-National Conflicts for a Post-Cold-War, European Order," Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 22.

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<sup>17</sup>Sray, 9.

<sup>18</sup>UCIRF, III-6

<sup>19</sup>Bugajski, 3.

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<sup>21</sup>UCIRF, III-3.

<sup>22</sup>Sray, 8.

- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., 8-10.
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- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., 15.
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## CHAPTER 4

### THE EFFECTS OF US AND NATO POLICY ON SAFE AREAS

What is at issue here is the coherence of NATO, the future of NATO, and the role of the United States as a leader of NATO.<sup>1</sup>

Defense Secretary Perry, RUSI Journal.

To better understand the safe area dilemma that confronted the UN, it is instructive to trace the evolution of US policy and how this policy directly affected the safe area situation. Similarly, because the US promoted NATO as a vital instrument for achieving its policy objectives in Bosnia,<sup>2</sup> it is equally instructive to examine the US and NATO relationship vis-à-vis the safe area policy. As the world's sole military super power, a permanent representative to the Security Council, and as the leader of NATO, the US bears a direct responsibility for the litany of contradictions that emerged from the ineffectual safe area policy. Whereas the Europeans envisioned safe areas as a means of protecting troubled enclaves of Bosnian civilians and averting mass refugee flows into Western Europe, the Americans interpreted the safe area regime as a means to help the Bosnians win the war.<sup>3</sup>

Since the US is the leader of NATO, its policy position intrinsically carries an authoritative weight within the organization's decision making process and direction. Again, since the US was unwilling to commit ground troops, the US asserted itself through NATO. US and NATO policies toward Bosnia developed a symbiotic relationship since the US was the strongest advocate of employing air power to protect safe areas (and because NATO was the military institution tasked with the mission of delivering that airpower). The US advocated the efficacy of airpower not only to protect UNPROFOR units from harms way but also to prevent "armed attacks" of the safe areas. As NATO's leader--and for added leverage--the US was willing to provide the preponderance of aircraft, the associated C4I, and logistics to sustain this operation. Once NATO airpower was misapplied (according to Washington and some NATO proponents) on several occasions in 1994, a NATO



versus UN row developed over the respective interpretations of the doctrinal application of airpower. Overtime, the Clinton Administration voiced grave concern over NATO's loss of credibility. The US vital interest at stake was no longer Bosnia, but the integrity, credibility, and survivability of the NATO alliance.

US policy was inconsistent throughout the war's course. With their meandering policy courses, the Bush and Clinton Administrations' policies both compounded the complexities of the conflict. In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War triumph, the Bush Administration was unwilling to take the lead in what seemed like a European problem at the time. With the crisis contained within regions of Croatia and in Bosnia, Washington argued that no vital US interests were at stake. Once the Bush Administration abdicated its super power leadership status to the Europeans and their institutions, the US was not an active player in conflict management. According to Warren Zimmerman, the last American Ambassador to Yugoslavia, "Between July 1991 to March 1992, the United States was not a major factor in the Yugoslav crisis . . . . Yugoslavia had become a tar baby in Washington. Nobody wanted to touch it. With the American presidential election just a year away, it was seen as a loser."<sup>4</sup> Although the Bush Administration stood on the side line and avoided all risks, it did applaud and support the European Community's encouragement to the Izetbegovic Government to hold the referendum on secession which ultimately led to the premature recognition of Bosnia and the ensuing civil war.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1992 Presidential Campaign, candidate Clinton seized on the public outrage over the television coverage that depicted Bosnian Serb atrocities against the Bosnian Muslims and the ineffectiveness of the Bush administration's policy.<sup>6</sup> Clinton's campaign rhetoric advocated a firmer response against Serb aggression. The incoming Clinton Administration unambiguously aired its grievances with the Vance-Owen Peace Process (VOPP) once entering the White House. The new administration believed that this plan rewarded aggression and thus would set an unfavorable precedent for other would be nationalistic aggressors on the horizon. Washington's policy was also inextricably linked to an on-again and off-again emotionally driven response to the endless stream of live media coverage that vividly depicted the plight of the Muslims. Since this policy position was

based more on sentimentalities rather than pragmatic courses of action, the Clinton Administration's "interpretation of the war as one of Serbian aggression made any compromise settlement vulnerable to the charge of rewarding aggression"<sup>7</sup> and the fruits of ethnic cleansing. With the Serbs labeled as aggressors, the President crafted a policy that presumed away all evidence of a civil war. The simplistic view of this policy demonized the Serbs and sent signals to the Izetbegovic Government that Washington would protect Sarajevo's sovereignty and tacitly support their military aims. However, despite Clinton's expressed concern for the Bosnian's plight, he also ruled out the deployment of US ground troops.<sup>8</sup> This policy contradiction--the propping up of the Muslim Government strategic aims without providing the requisite military support--directly contributed to the intractability of the war and ineffectiveness of the safe area policy.

Without Washington's endorsement, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan was scuttled. In its place the Clinton Administration felt obliged to offer a new policy to the UN and European Community. Without much conceptualization, the plan of "lift and strike" became the centerpiece of the Clinton Administration's Bosnian policy in early 1993. As Lawrence Freedman noted, the strategy gained appeal for several reasons:

It rested on the assumption that a properly armed Bosnian government force backed by Western airpower could reverse the pattern of Serb gains. Influenced by the imagery of Desert Storm, many Americans believed that air strikes posed slight risks of casualties to the intervening forces and maximized the West's strongest military card. Lift and strike could avoid the twin political liabilities of rewarding Serb aggression and risking US ground forces.<sup>9</sup>

As Freedman noted, the Clinton Administration rationalized that it could take a decisive role in shaping a favorable outcome in the conflict while simultaneously avoiding serious risks to national treasure, blood, and prestige. That is, Washington could opt for a "valid" solution that would achieve three policy objectives: hold off the media and thus world opinion, avoid the requisite risks associated with deploying ground troops, and allow the administration to get back to more pressing domestic political issues (e.g., the health care debate--a salient issue that brought Clinton to the White House--was entering a critical moment). The enlistment of NATO airpower was integral to this plan. As the leader of NATO, the Administration presumed it could pressure its NATO allies to endorse this policy.<sup>10</sup> However, because the Europeans were cautious about the likely Bosnian Serb reprisals

against their troop contingents on the ground, they had doubts over the efficacy of airpower in Bosnia, and had an inherently different perspective of the conflict. In effect, they distanced themselves from the Washington-led initiative. The Europeans believed that the US desired to intervene on behalf of the Izetbegovic government through the auspices of NATO. This sat ill with alliance members. Britain and France complained that "the Americans want to conduct the music but not play in the band."<sup>11</sup> As a result, a trans-Atlantic rift widened between the Europeans and the US over the policy. Moreover, the Clinton Administration's Bosnian policy lost further credibility on the world stage because of marked delays in policy formulation and its disjointed message on Bosnia. In regards to this subject, Richard Betts wrote:

In a bizarre sequence of statements last spring [just after assuming office in 1993], President Clinton threatened air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, and then said, 'The United States is not, and should not, become involved as a partisan in this war.' Next he declared that the United States should lead other Western nations in ending ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, only to say a moment later, 'That does not mean that the United States or the United Nations can enter a war, in effect, to redraw the lines . . . within what was Yugoslavia.'<sup>12</sup>

The White House withdrew its explicit support for the "lift and strike" policy after Secretary Christopher's diplomatic tour to Europe failed to elicit allied support in the Spring of 1993. The Europeans--with troops on the ground--rejected the policy as unsuitable to their views of the situation in Bosnia. Moreover, as the Betts' remarks illustrate, many of the Europeans lost confidence in the Americans' perspective on the war. With European support lacking and the Americans still unwilling to take a lead in Bosnia, the Clinton Administration reversed its policy. The White House substituted the rhetoric of Bosnian sovereignty and its image of multi-ethnicity with more pragmatic talk based on the European view of the problem.<sup>13</sup> With the shelving of lift and strike, Secretary Christopher described "Bosnia as an intractable problem from hell that no one can be expected to solve . . . less as a moral tragedy . . . and more as a tribal feud that no outsider could hope to settle."<sup>14</sup> Concurrently, both the President and the Secretary of State began to describe the conflict in Bosnia as a civil war rather than a war of aggression carried out by Belgrade.<sup>15</sup> Like the Europeans, the Americans for now shared the view that the conflict in Bosnia should be settled at the negotiating table and not on the battlefield.<sup>16</sup>

At virtually the same time, the Serbs ratcheted up the pressure on eastern Bosnia. With a general deterioration of the situation, the UN Security Council strengthened the no-fly resolution and passed UNSCR 816 on 31 March 1993, which authorized member states to "take all necessary measures to ensure compliance with a ban on flights."<sup>17</sup> On 12 April, NATO began Operation Deny Flight in direct support of this resolution.<sup>18</sup> Although enforcing a no-fly zone in this relatively benign environment was a low risk endeavor (given the US high tech means and the antiquated Bosnian Serb air defense system), Deny Flight did establish a new precedent for the employment of NATO aircraft in support of the UN and toward facilitating emerging US policy initiatives. As discussed earlier, this no-fly precedent dovetailed with the safe area plan to protect the troubled Muslim enclaves. This of course, led to the UNSCR's invitation for NATO to serve as the deterrence instrument and enforcer to fulfill the mandate's "protection" clause. In an effort to support European unanimity and to distance itself from the rejected policy idea of lift and strike, the Clinton Administration fell in line with the Europeans in the short term and supported this safe area plan. Even though the US continued to reject the partition principles of VOPP, the White House opted to project an image of solidarity with the Europeans.

Once the safe area policy was mandated (despite the shift in US policy to support the Europeans) the Americans became the strongest advocate for using this resolution as a means of launching air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. In effect, Resolution 836, which authorized member states "to take all necessary measures" through the use of airpower to support UNPROFOR in the field, the Security Council tacitly conceded to the airpower enthusiasts from the US and NATO. With a stalled peace process, safe areas were now the centerpiece of the UN's mission in Bosnia. However, since only two member states volunteered to send troops to add a credible ground deterrence piece to the safe areas, the Security Council painted itself in to a corner and was forced to contract out this deterrence piece to NATO. In short, this safe areas resolution brought NATO from the periphery of the problem to its center stage.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has undergone a profound process of evolution and adaptation.<sup>19</sup> With mutual military assistance still at its core (Article 5), but with no monolithic threat,

NATO expanded its horizons to embrace crisis management and peace support operations based on its New Strategic Concept Plan of 1991.<sup>20</sup> As NATO was adapting to the new political and military realities of the post-Cold War period, "Out of area or out of business became the battle-cry at NATO Headquarters in Brussels."<sup>21</sup> Concurrently, the situation in the former Yugoslavia deteriorated further. With this new post Cold War mindset, NATO's member states accepted a direct peace support role in 1993.

In retrospect, although NATO offered a unique military structure to confront traditional conflict, it was not well suited for the complexities of ethnic warfare. As Jonathan Eyal observed, "Dampening ethnic conflicts requires the combination of force with political persuasion, a task which NATO, as a blunt military instrument, is not well equipped to perform."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, as Eyal further elaborated, "NATO's commanders understood this and tried to steer clear of Yugoslavia during 1991 and 1992. But under essentially American pressure, the Alliance became embroiled in a conflict for which it was ill-suited."<sup>23</sup>

From April 1993 until the Dayton Agreement in 1995, NATO operated three separate but coordinated air missions in Bosnia.<sup>24</sup> All three operations were initiated within a span of just four months between April and August of 1993 (coincidentally after the VOPP was dead). Again, NATO began enforcement of the no-fly zone in April 93; next, in August of 1993 NATO agreed to provide close air support (CAS) for UNPROFOR (which NATO conducted only upon the UN's request); last, also in August 1993, NATO agreed to support UNPROFOR with airstrikes to deter attacks on safe areas.<sup>25</sup> This last mission would prove to be the most debated and contentious use of NATO airpower. It also served as a catalyst for American policy. Beyond the scale of CAS, these airstrikes were authorized on a broader scope to serve as a deterrent instrument; moreover, because of the UN's concern of the safety of its troop contingents on the ground, the use of airstrikes required a "dual-key" agreement between NATO and the UN.<sup>26</sup> This dual-key approach would lead to significant friction between the two organizations. In short, the limited use of airpower until the summer of 1995 was directly related to the UN's imperative of remaining impartial to the conflict. The UN used airpower as a means to leverage the political process whereas NATO believed that only forceful strikes on

multiple targets would provide a credible deterrent and thus force the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiation table.

Even though many diplomats thought that airpower was the panacea to enforcing the new safe area policy, military planners and the Bosnian Serbs understood its limitations. Regarding this issue, Secretary Perry said, "No responsible military commander believes we can change the outcome of the war with an air campaign alone . . . . Bosnia is not Iraq."<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Freedman said there were a host of reasons to be wary of this airpower panacea:

. . . the difficulty of identifying mobile and concealable targets and the question of whether to attack if they were placed close to civilian targets; the danger of stray bombs killing civilians or even friendly UN forces; the diminishing returns on extra sorties once easier targets had been hit; the domestic and international political uproar if punitive attacks resulted in high casualties, the probability that bad weather and rugged terrain would aggravate all these problems.<sup>28</sup>

From his perspective on the ground, General Rose also provided a similar argument against the use of airpower to protect the safe areas.

It must be recognized that there exist obvious limitations on the use of air power in any confused civil war situation--especially when, as in Bosnia, aircraft cannot fly for much time because of poor weather. It is simply not militarily possible to secure safe areas or enforce the passage of convoys by the use of air power alone.<sup>29</sup>

In a subsequent article, Freedman wrote: "Airpower is no substitute for land forces . . . . When the opponent's main advantage is in land power, then air power may make little difference or even be counter-productive, especially in a civil war in which the two sides have become inter-mingled."<sup>30</sup> As Freedman noted in both remarks above, the issue of collateral damage limited the role of NATO airpower in support of the safe areas. However, with no new troops on the way and an already over-stretched mission, the UN depended on NATO airpower as the deterrent for the safe area policy.

The introduction of airpower ironically served as a Pandora's box (rather than a panacea) toward conflict resolution. The US support behind the efficacy of airpower to thwart Bosnian Serb aggression worked at cross purposes to the UN-supported peace process. How could the UN deliver humanitarian aid impartially while militarily punishing one side? The more the US talked about airpower as the tool to reverse the consequences of Bosnian Serb force, the more the US "was giving false hope to the Bosnian Government"<sup>31</sup> to continue fighting. The Muslims stiff armed the UN peace process under US encouragement. The Bosnians saw the introduction of NATO airpower as

a direct link in assistance toward two immediate goals: "to ensure the conflict continues so it can attempt to capture more ground . . . [and] to seek greater international involvement to assist in achieving its long range objective of establishing an Islamic dominated republic."<sup>32</sup> The US approach to conflict resolution had two fundamental contradictions at its core: "The US says that its objective is to end the war through negotiated settlement . . . but in reality wants to influence the outcome in favor of Muslims."<sup>33</sup> As addressed in chapter three, the Muslim Government became more emboldened "from the delusion that NATO elements would come to their aid in a crisis."<sup>34</sup>

Even though the US policy continuously showed signs of confusion and ambiguity through the remainder of 1993 (that is, showing signs of unity with European policy while simultaneously sending signals of possible intervention to the Bosnians) events took a dramatic turn in February of 1994. Sixty-eight civilians were killed when a mortar shell exploded in a central Sarajevo market place on 5 February. Under worldwide live television coverage, the carnage pressured the Security Council to take a more strident stand. The West's containment policy--confronted by the CNN effect--now seemed untenable. The international community strongly condemned the attack as a result of this dramatic coverage. Under intense American pressure, the UN Security Council requested (in accordance with resolution 836) NATO airstrikes to lift the siege of Sarajevo. The North Atlantic Council (NAC), in coordination with the UN Secretary-General, issued a statement calling "for the withdrawal, or regrouping and placing under UNPROFOR control within ten days, all heavy weapons of the Bosnian Serb forces located in the area within the 20 kilometer total exclusion zone (TEZ) around Sarajevo."<sup>35</sup> Heeding the NATO ultimatum, the crisis was averted when the Bosnian Serbs complied with the terms of the request and withdrew most of their heavy weapons.

During this pull out, a controversy emerged over the mortar's origin of fire. A UN investigation team "received technical information which pointed to the mortar bomb having come not from the Serb-controlled areas but from a Muslim controlled areas"<sup>36</sup> within the city. However, because the UN feared dramatic fallout from releasing the report (e.g., overriding public perception that the Serbs were the aggressors in the war, the poor image of UNPROFOR, and the fact that

Westerners would be unable to comprehend that the Bosnian Government could carry out an attack against their own people to leverage an international response), the UN never released the report.<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, this mortar attack had two profound impacts on the major external actors: it gave the Clinton Administration the excuse to once again break from the pragmatic approach of the Europeans and to be seen as doing something under the close media scrutiny, and, with the NAC decisions, it brought NATO to the center stage of the problem. In a premature assessment, most Western analysts reasoned that if the Serbs backed down to the NATO ultimatum around Sarajevo under these conditions, then they would back down elsewhere as well.

Washington reasserted itself in the post market massacre period and quietly facilitated an important breakthrough that would make a significant impact on the eventual course of the war. After a period of vicious fighting, the Muslims and Bosnian Croats decided to patch up their differences (or, more fittingly, bury the hatchet) and form a federation under the terms of the Washington Agreement in March 1994.<sup>38</sup> As discussed in chapter two, even though the two erstwhile enemies would mistrust each other for the remainder of the war, the agreement did allow the Muslims to transfer a considerable portion of their forces to directly confront the Serbs; furthermore, it opened up an arms conduit through Croatia proper into the heart of Bosnia. Without Washington's encouragement and endorsement, this agreement would have been unlikely. With the new Washington agreement in effect, the re-emergence of an assertive Clinton Administration, an emboldened NATO, and a reeling Bosnian Serb army in the aftermath of their withdrawal from the Sarajevo TEZ, the Sarajevo government seized upon these favorable conditions to shift the momentum of the war. Realizing that only military successes would place it in a favorable negotiating position, Sarajevo now tried to take the initiative and capitalize on this momentum shift.<sup>39</sup> As discussed in chapter three, the Muslims decided to make Gorazde their litmus test based on these new conditions. In late March of 1994, the Muslims launched provocative attacks from the Gorazde safe area. When the Serbs counter attacked in force in early April, the Security Council authorized NATO strikes to protect endangered UN military observers. NATO launched two limited strikes on 10 and 11 April per the request of the UN.



NATO launched one additional attack on 16 April, which resulted in disaster when the BSA hit a British Harrier fighter aircraft with a surface to air missile.

As the BSA continued their attack against the safe area, coupled with an ineffectual UN and NATO response, the NAC authorized (on 22 April) broader airstrikes against Bosnian Serb military targets around the safe area if the BSA continued their attacks. Moreover, the NAC agreed to enforce two exclusion zones: a three-kilometer zone from which all BSA forces were to withdraw and a 20-kilometer zone from which all BSA heavy weapons were likewise to be removed. Concurrently, Moscow confronted the UN and NATO alliance on the one sided use of airstrikes against the Bosnian Serbs. Because the Russians opposed further airstrikes on the Serbs, a Russia and NATO standoff on the wider use of airstrikes emerged.<sup>40</sup>

However, with their tactical objectives met (i.e. significantly degrading the BiH offensive capabilities within the Gorazde safe area), the BSA met the terms of the NAC ultimatum. So, with Bosnian Serb compliance, a wider crisis was yet again averted. Nonetheless, the airstrikes proved to be "both ineffectual and provocative . . . and they highlighted the inadequacy of coordination between the UN and NATO and exposed American policy as ill-considered."<sup>41</sup> The US strongly advocated further airstrikes to punish the Serbs, but the UN and the Europeans hedged their unequivocal support of the airstrike strategy. For example, the British, with one aircraft already shot down, chastised US policy: "Because your government does not have troops on the ground, its suggestions on what course to follow are not very well received."<sup>42</sup> The UN called the airstrikes off because of the following factors: the Serbs halted their attack (but the slow response allowed the Serbs to meet their tactical aims), their immediate concern over the balance of the humanitarian mission, concerns over Russian objections to further airstrikes, and the fear of reprisals against UN troops on the ground. In a damaging precedent, once the UN signaled its apprehension over employing NATO airstrikes in Gorazde, the Bosnian Serbs received the message that the UN did not possess the will to execute the deterrent aspects of the safe area policy. That is, the Serbs realized the hollowness of the safe area mandate and called the UN's bluff.

After the Gorazde crisis, the Clinton Administration asserted itself further and provided the impetus for the establishment of the five nations Contact Group. With the Vance-Owen Peace Plan rejected, the Contact Group (US, France, Germany, Britain, and Russia) now held the reigns of the peace process. At the same time the US once again called for more robust use of NATO airpower to protect the safe areas and to force the Serbs to accept the terms of the Contact Group plan. With this reversal in US policy, Susan Woodward stated: "The policy debate remained unchanged since the UN forces were first deployed to Bosnia . . . [but] the UN operation became untenable in mid-1994 when it was tasked to implement US policy to shift the military balance in favor of the Bosnian government and to punish the Bosnian Serbs into diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, and bombing threats to accept the Contact Group plan . . . this policy was directly in conflict with the source of the peacekeepers' credibility . . ."<sup>43</sup>

The Contact Group developed a plan and map that gave the Federation of Muslims and Croats 51 percent and the Serbs 49 percent of Bosnia's territory. When the Serbs rejected the plan in August 1994, because of misgivings over the map, the Contact Group's "take it or leave it" process stalled through the remainder of the summer and fall of 1994. Meanwhile, according to George Kenney, the Clinton Administration resumed its ambivalent policy of "halfheartedly pursuing a strategy that did nothing to end the war while raising tensions with Britain and France; arguing for lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia, unilaterally ending American enforcement of the embargo and pressing for more NATO airstrikes."<sup>44</sup> As discussed in chapter three, with a stalled peace process and "with faint American encouragement that has led to gross Muslim overconfidence,"<sup>45</sup> the Bosnians launched a large scale attack from the safe area of Bihac in late October of 1994. When the BSA counterattacked in force and threatened the Bihac safe area, this became the next salient crisis to affect US and NATO policy.

In late November, after the Serbs reversed the Muslim gains, the BSA shelled military and civilian targets (key headquarters and logistics installations of the government's Fifth Corps were co-located with civilians in the town of Bihac) within the safe area and stood poised to capture the town. The BSA in conjunction with the Krajina Serb forces across the border, launched air raids of the Bihac

enclave with aircraft from the Udbina airbase in Croatia. On 21 November, acting under resolution 958 (which extended the no-fly resolution to include Croatian airspace), NATO launched its most lethal air attack in its history on the Udbina airbase to prevent further air raids on the Bihac pocket. Two days later, after Bosnian Serb forces fired surface to air missiles (SAM) at NATO aircraft flying over the Bihac safe area, NATO launched attacks to neutralize their SAM sites defending the area. Despite the cumulative effect of these NATO strikes and UN Security Council warnings, the Bosnian Serbs continued their attacks against the safe area; moreover, in apparent retaliation for the NATO airstrikes, the Bosnian Serbs detained UN personnel and shut down the humanitarian effort throughout Bosnia.

With this Bosnian Serb defiance, the US called for wider and more lethal airstrikes; the Europeans and the UN, on the other hand, balked at further escalation out of fear of retaliation directed against their troops on the ground, the scuttling of the wider humanitarian mission, and a belief that the Serb counterattack was arguably justifiable. Also, instead of ratcheting up tensions, the Europeans collectively believed that a negotiated peace was the least awful course to pursue.<sup>46</sup> As a result of the US and European divergent views, analysts labeled the transatlantic rift as the most serious since the 1956 Suez crisis (when Washington forced London and Paris to back away from their intervention).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, according to Woodward, "NATO faced its Dunkirk in the first week of December 1994, according to the response of its core governments, because the UN prevented it from using sufficient force against Serb forces in the Bihac pocket."<sup>48</sup>

With most of their military aims met (i.e. inflicting serious damage upon the Muslim 5th Corps and restoring the original confrontation line), the Bosnian Serbs agreed to a temporary cease-fire on 30 November. Further fallout between the US and the Europeans was averted. In short, the Europeans rejected a stepped-up bombing campaign to protect the safe areas. And, with the absence of American troops on the ground, the US was "robbed of much of its authority in the alliance's decision-making councils" as it called for a wider air campaign.<sup>49</sup> What is more, NATO was caught in the middle. After Bihac (and after Gorazde), despite the impediments set up by the UN, NATO looked ineffectual.

Following the Bihac debacle, President Carter secured a broader four month cease fire (1 January to 30 April). Meanwhile, in a total contradiction of the spirit of a cease fire, Senator Dole made a pronouncement that he intended to initiate legislation to arm and train the Muslims if the cease-fire failed (the Republicans now controlled both houses of Congress after the November elections). With this statement, in addition to the Clinton Administration's insistence on using airpower to protect the safe areas, coupled with the intractable nature of the conflict, the British and French announced they were considering pulling out their forces.

After the Carter initiative and with the specter of the US-led NATO effort to withdraw UNPROFOR, the White House once again shifted policy and exerted additional leverage in trying to foster a negotiated settlement through the Contact Group. Despite the indications that the warring factions regarded the cease-fire as an invitation to regroup and prepare for more war in the spring, the time seemed ripe for a negotiated settlement during this cease fire period. In this vein, the Americans began sending diplomats to engage in direct talks with Pale (the Bosnian Serb Capitol). Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State, was described as the "architect of new American policy toward the Bosnian Serbs."<sup>50</sup> He provided the impetus for the Contact Group to even visit Pale on 13 January 1995. However, since Pale distrusted the Contact Group's agenda and still disagreed with the final map, Karadzic bargained from a position of control and continued to refuse their plan.

At this point, during an address on 14 March, Secretary Perry translated US policy options to two possible courses of action: "Choice A is to stick with our current policy, limiting the threat of the war and its impact on people while we are working for peace; choice B is to begin actively helping the Bosnian government achieve its political and military goals."<sup>51</sup>

In the absence of a negotiated settlement, the Bosnians prepared for further military operations from the breathing space of the cease-fire. Sarajevo rejected the UN's efforts to extend the Carter truce and pronounced their intent to break the siege of Sarajevo.<sup>52</sup> In April 1995, the Muslims launched simultaneous attacks from the Tuzla safe area (which served as the headquarters for the government's Second Corps) area, western Bosnia (Travnik area), and from Sarajevo. In a major development, Croatia conducted a full scale attack to take the UN Protected Area (UNPA) West in

the west Slavonia region of Croatia proper. This attack forced thousands of Croatian Serb refugees into Bosnia, and signaled a shift in the balance of power in favor of Zagreb's spheres of influence. Ironically, there was no UN Security Council outrage nor movement to declare this UNPA as "safe area" to protect the Croatian Serb civilians from direct Croatian attack.

The defeat of Serb forces in Croatia emboldened the Federation's partners to follow Zagreb's example and exploit the rifts in Serb unity (Belgrade, Knin, and Pale all held different views on how to further prosecute the war). With simultaneous Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat ongoing attacks (some even coordinated between the Federation partners), General Mladic moved against Sarajevo and prepared to move against the eastern enclaves in an effort to relieve the pressure against these areas under attack. Moreover, Mladic reasoned that if he could pressure Sarajevo and collapse the enclaves, he could free-up desperately needed forces to confront the Muslims elsewhere. A decisive Bosnian defeat could ultimately force them to the negotiation table. In general, the situation deteriorated throughout April-May 1995. When the Bosnian Serbs closed the airport in Sarajevo, cut the city's utilities, shut down humanitarian aid convoys, removed their heavy weapons from UN control, and resumed shelling of Muslim cities, UNPROFOR called for NATO airstrikes to protect its contingents.<sup>53</sup> After two airstrikes on 24 and 25 May against a Pale ammunition dump, the Bosnian Serbs took about 350 UN hostages. In a familiar scene, the UN--under European pressure--called off the what was meant to be a punishing NATO air campaign.<sup>54</sup>

A key event emerged as a result of the new round of hostage taking: the British and French pressured NATO and European ministers to deploy two rapid reaction brigades--about 10,000 troops with a significant complement of artillery, light tanks, and helicopters--to provide enhanced force protection capabilities.

The deployment of these French and British troops, coupled with stepped-up BiH raids from Srebrenica, caused the Bosnian Serbs to move against the eastern enclaves before these forces could deploy and cement the Muslim toehold in the heart of Bosnian Serb held area.<sup>55</sup> Further, since the Bosnian Croats and Muslims were making considerable gains in western Bosnia, General Mladic argued that his forces needed to restore their combat credibility and to regain the initiative in the war.<sup>56</sup>

Once the Serbs were determined to attack Srebrenica in force, in spite of the threat of international reprisal, the UN and NATO knew their bluff was finally called. The Dutch contingents request for air support on 10 July was not approved, and once it was approved on 11 July it was too late to be effective.<sup>57</sup> At this point, with no live television videotape available from the isolated area (TV media only recorded the refugees arriving in Tuzla days later),<sup>58</sup> the UN opted to cut its losses and allow the Serbs to take the safe area.

The fall of Srebrenica on 11 July, followed by the fall of Zepa on 18 July, finally emboldened the White House to take the lead to protect the remaining safe areas from Bosnian Serb attacks. In early July, Washington opted to forge a policy that would put the US in control of events by "demanding a new approach that would force the combatants to the bargaining table."<sup>59</sup> It now was apparent that the President intended to adopt the views of his aggressive Assistant Secretary of State. In an article published in March/April 1995 *Foreign Affairs*, Assistant Secretary Holbrooke stated that "... the United States has become a European Power in a sense that goes beyond traditional assertions of America's 'commitment' to Europe."<sup>60</sup> After nearly three years of allowing the NATO allies to determine the limits of American policy, President Clinton said that the "status quo is not acceptable."<sup>61</sup> His policy team further acknowledged that the US must take the mantle of leadership in developing a new approach to conflict resolution in Bosnia.<sup>62</sup>

In response to Clinton's new pledge, Secretary Perry crafted a plan that would unleash a massive strategic air campaign in the event that the Bosnian Serbs remained undeterred. Perry further stated, "We're trying to equalize the differential between the Bosnian forces on the ground that do not have heavy weapons and the Bosnian Serb forces that do . . . and airpower is quite capable of providing the equalization."<sup>63</sup> On 1 Aug, NATO ministers supported the US plan and declared--with the UN's endorsement--that any attacks on the "remaining safe areas would be met by overwhelming, disproportionate force, not necessarily confined to the area of the attack."<sup>64</sup>

In the end, the irony of the new found resolve was directly linked to the fall of two of the safe areas. As written in the *Economist*, "The real outcome of the fall of the enclaves may be to bring a balance of force closer, following some kind of settlement to be negotiated in a brutal end game of

Bosnian Realpolitik . . . ."65 That is, with the transformation of the Bosnian map, the time was ripe for change because three of the safe areas were removed from the map (Bihac was relieved by the Croat offensive that re-seized the Krajina and Srebrenica and Zepa were seized by the Serbs).

## Endnotes

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- <sup>3</sup>"The West's Two-Track Mind," *Economist*, (9 September 1995): 50.
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- <sup>15</sup>Tucker and Hendrickson, 23.
- <sup>16</sup>UN Document, S/25700, 22.
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- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 35.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 35.
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- <sup>28</sup>Freedman, "Why the West Failed," 64.
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- <sup>43</sup>Susan Woodward, "Time for a Post-mortem on Bosnia," Brookings Review, (June 1995): 51.
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<sup>58</sup>"NATO Declares War on the Bosnian Serbs," Economist, (2 September 1995): 42.

<sup>59</sup>Engleberg, A1.

<sup>60</sup>Richard Holbrooke, "America, A European Power," Foreign Affairs, 74, no. 2, (April/March 1995): 38.

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## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF SAFE AREAS' IMPACT ON THE WAR AND CONCLUSION

The Safe Area mandate was totally inconsistent . . . this was the worst single decision taken by the Security Council during my tenure as the Co-Chairman of the ICFY.

Lord David Owen, Balkan Odyssey, 335.

The events of the summer of 1995 broke the two-year stalemate in Bosnia and Croatia. Within the space of a month, "the map of the Balkans had undergone a fundamental transformation."<sup>1</sup> In spite of the enormously complex historical, political, and military realities of this bitter civil war, the airpower enthusiasts concluded that broader airstrikes led to the diplomatic breakthrough that in turn led to the Dayton talks. This simplistic view of course ignores the realities of several important factors. For example, there were critical concessions given to the Bosnian Serbs (e.g., the Geneva agreement of September 1995 formally recognized the Republika Srpska's right to establish relations with other countries), the fall of the Krajina region caused a major shift of power in the region, and the war weariness of all sides contributed to the breakthrough talks. Notwithstanding the important integration of all these factors, including NATO airpower, it cannot be overstated how the removal of Srebrenica, Bihac, and Zepa from the safe area list significantly impacted on the diplomatic process. Throughout all the iterations of failed UN sponsored talks (e.g., VOPP, Contact Group et al.), impasses arose over the unacceptable maps proposed. The dramatically changed territorial holdings made a significant impact on the negotiation process. The Bosnian Serbs believed they consolidated most of their gains in eastern Bosnia, while the Bosnian government believed the improved situation in the Bihac region and central Bosnia gave them an advantage. Depending on one's perspective, both sides could politically dress-up their gains and downplay their losses to their war weary

constituents. In fact, the fall of the safe areas arguably led to the Bosnian end game and the Dayton accord.

That said, the best tool for gauging the full impact of the safe area mandate on the UN peacekeeping operations and the Bosnian civil war is Philip Crowl's (Professor of Strategy at the Naval War College) *Strategic Catechism*.<sup>2</sup> Crowl's essay, "The Strategist's Short Catechism: Six Question's Without Answers," offers a useful methodology for assessing strategic plans and policy.<sup>3</sup> In his view, military intervention policy should be predicated on six questions: What is the objective? Does the military objective fit the overall political strategy? What are the limits of military power? What are the alternatives? How strong is the home front? And does today's policy overlook points of difference and exaggerate points of likeness between the past and present? Although Crowl's methodology is designed for broad strategic analysis, it is equally suitable for assessing policy decisions for both military and peace operations at the operational level. For the purposes of analysis, this author has modified Crowl's questions to fit the safe area policy.

First, what were the objectives of the safe areas? The objectives of the safe area policy were never clearly specified. Indeed, the objectives of the policy were intentionally ambiguous. UN Security Council Resolution 824 and 836 refer to at least three stated objectives: protect civilians, reverse Serb gains, and promote a lasting political solution (VOPP). Also, the objective to stem refugee flow was implied. These political objectives were difficult to translate into military objectives given the limited resources, manpower, wherewithal on the ground, and the ambiguity of the Security Council's true intentions. For example, could the safe area policy stem refugee flows, protect civilians, and reverse Serb gains all simultaneously? Let us not forget that the original purpose of UNPROFOR's mandated mission was to support humanitarian assistance operations under chapter six provisions of the UN Charter. With the realities of both friction and mission creep, the Security Council expanded the original UNPROFOR mandate to include establishing the conditions for conducive diplomatic negotiations, monitoring of cease-fires, and protecting safe areas. In order to do these tasks, as Thorvald Stoltenberg noted, the UN risked violating the traditional peacekeeping tenet of impartiality:

UNPROFOR must maintain impartiality and its presence has to be accepted by all parties. The composition of the force is based on these principles. It is not a war-fighting force; it is not equipped for war-fighting, and the contributing states did not send it there for that purpose . . . The very credibility of UNPROFOR, its continued presence and its ability to perform its role depend on the maintenance of impartiality.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the Bosnian Serb perception that the UN was unfairly aiding the Bosnian government to Pale's detriment, the overall peace operation and maintenance of impartiality was achievable until the adoption of UNSCR 824 and 836. Given the military means, the ambitious nature of the safe areas resolutions cannot be overstated. A review of 836 reveals that the resolution was specifically mandated "to ensure the protection of the civilian population in safe areas and to promote a lasting political solution . . ."<sup>5</sup> However, later in the body in paragraph five, it tasks UNPROFOR "to deter attacks against the safe areas, to monitor the cease-fire, to promote the withdrawal of military or paramilitary units other than those of the Government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to occupy some key points on the ground, in addition to participating in the delivery of humanitarian relief to the population . . ."<sup>6</sup> Again given the means and nature of the overall UNPROFOR mandate, this language seems divorced from reality. For example, how was UNPROFOR supposed to "promote" the withdrawal of a superior military force in the absence of diplomatic negotiations? As Stoltenberg observed, the UN force was simply not configured for warfighting. Even further, the Security Council affirmed in paragraph six "that these safe areas are a temporary measure and that the primary objective remains to reverse the consequences of the use of force . . . with the prompt implementation of the Vance-Owen Plan . . ."<sup>7</sup> Also, the Security Council "decided that Member States, acting nationally or through regional arrangement, might take, under its authority, all necessary measures through the use of airpower, in and around the safe areas, to support UNPROFOR."<sup>8</sup> In this clause, the Security Council yielded to the airpower proponents (principally the US) that advocated for political expediency that the UN could exert its will from the safety and standoff range of high-technological aircraft. Because 836 overlooked additional force requirements, Resolution 844 was passed on 19 June to authorize an additional 7,600 peacekeepers to help UNPROFOR carry out these new tasks.<sup>9</sup>

None of the mandated safe area resolutions specifically addressed NATO allies' desires to prevent further refugee flows into western Europe. As examined in chapter one and two, this writer gleaned this implicit political objective from the literature. In the initial safe areas conceptual planning phase in the early stages of the war, it is clear that the policy idea was conceived not out of the NATO allies' concern for the plight of civilians but of the prospects of unrelenting refugee flows into western Europe. After the implementation of the safe area resolutions, large refugee transfers beyond the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia were averted; therefore, it seems apparent that the safe area policy did achieve this one sub-objective.

On the one hand, in analyzing the multiple objectives at the time 836 was implemented, it seems clear that some of the objectives were achievable in the short run. For example, the protecting of civilians and the stemming of refugee flows in the short run were feasible (notwithstanding the member state's reluctance to support the Security Council call for more troops). On the other hand, based on the wording of the document, it was not suitable to reverse the consequences of Bosnian Serb force while simultaneously attempting to promote a lasting political solution. That is, safe areas properly implemented and enforced could suitably stem the use of further force but not realistically reverse the consequences of force given the political will of the international community at the time.

It is clear the objectives were essentially incompatible. For example, could the UN expect to stem refugee flows and protect civilians while trying to reverse the consequences of aggression and promote a political solution? Not realistically. Furthermore, it was an illusion for the Security Council to believe that it could stay within the boundaries of traditional peacekeeping while trying to pursue all these safe area objectives simultaneously. When traditional peacekeeping crossed the threshold to military intervention (as the use of force indicated), then the whole calculus of the peacekeeping operation changed. Although Carl von Clausewitz addressed the nature of war, once the Security Council opted for *de facto* military intervention, then the teachings of Clausewitz became germane to the operation. Clausewitz argued that "... the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for , nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."<sup>10</sup>

In short, it seems apparent that the safe area resolutions were only suitable for at best achieving the desired effects of two out of four objectives (protecting civilians and stemming refugee flows). But since the UN never deployed a sufficient force mix, even these objectives were unachievable.

Second, did the safe area policy fit the larger political strategy? Again, the safe area policy did meet some of the goals of the larger peacekeeping strategy, but only in the short run. That is, the safe area policy did in the short run generally protect Muslim civilians from wanton Bosnian Serb aggression and ethnic cleansing within the six designated areas (however, in some respects, the Bosnian Serbs shifted their military emphasis against those areas not registered as safe areas, e.g., Bijelina, and freely neutralized these areas). Although the policy did put the brakes on further consolidation of BSA military gains, it had no effect on reversing these gains. As a consequence, the safe areas did prevent further large refugee flows beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia as well. However, both in the short term and long term, the safe areas had a negative impact on the negotiated peace process for a host of reasons addressed earlier (e.g., the Bosnian Government became less willing to negotiate in good faith with UN and NATO *carte blanche* to attack to regain lost territory). As the peace process was effectively scuttled and the Bosnian Government stepped-up its military activity, the safe areas in the long term became increasingly vulnerable to BSA attacks. And in the absence of any real ongoing diplomatic process, the UN found it increasingly difficult to protect the safe areas. Consequently the UN faced a key dilemma, the safe areas were set-up, in part, to facilitate the peace process; however, since the Muslims realized the UN was obligated to protect the safe areas, they were less willing to negotiate in good faith and used the safe areas as stepping stones to launch attacks and bring NATO military intervention against the Bosnian Serbs. With the safe areas' promise, the Muslims keenly understood that NATO and UN (and thus US) credibility were on the line. As a result, the Bosnians fomented the tenuous situation to their advantage.

Third, what were the limits of military power in protecting the safe areas? As Crowl suggests in his essay, "the first requirement for answering this question is a careful calculation of one's resources."<sup>11</sup> Although the Security Council made the statement that "all necessary measures . . . through the use of airpower . . ." would be employed, this effort was specifically designed "to support

UNPROFOR" and not protect civilians. In short, it is clear the Security Council was not prepared to allocate the required resources and manpower (or accept the requisite costs) to achieve the ambitious set of goals envisioned for this safe area concept. Compounding the problem, according to UNPROFOR commanders on the ground at the time, even the UN Security Council authorized troop levels were insufficient to carry out the stated mandate.<sup>12</sup> Political, institutional, philosophical and financial realities hamstrung the UN Security Council's ability to choose the more realistic force packages. In this vacuum, the Council opted for the half measure of deploying the light package of 7,600 additional peacekeepers. Despite the authorization on paper for the 7,600 troops, the Secretary-General reported that it took more than a year to organize the necessary increase to meet the minimum requirements.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, it cannot be overstated that this increase was designed as a symbolic presence only. The UN military advisers to the Secretariat's office recommended an additional force of about 35,000 troops to adequately protect the safe areas, which was adjusted downward from the 70,000 to 100,000 Lieutenant General Briquemont forecasted. David Owen said that the "Security Council embarked on the path of enforcement with no intention of backing it with the necessary resources."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this estimate did not take into consideration the additional security requirements for force protection and humanitarian support once the UN crossed the Mogadishu line to enforce the safe areas under Chapter Seven. Despite the realities of the symbolic force deployed to the safe areas (e.g., Zepa, Gorazde, Srebrenica only had 69, 300, 400 troops, respectively), the Security Council did not temper its expectations for success based on the meager increase in forces. And despite the host of pitfalls associated with the safe area plan and the inherent weaknesses of UNPROFOR in a Chapter Seven environment, the Security Council did not anticipate that the Serbs may go undeterred or that the Muslims may convert the safe areas into bases of military operations.

In order for the UNPROFOR to execute this new beefed-up mission, as discussed in chapter two, the enlistment of NATO airpower became integral to the plan. The limitations of airpower in support of peace operations in Bosnia was addressed in detail in chapters two and four. In short, NATO airpower was assessed as a blunt military instrument that was not very suitable for both



protecting the six safe areas and promoting a lasting political solution. In addition, until the summer of 1995, the UN and NATO differed on the underlying mission of airpower. As stated earlier, the UN saw airpower as a lethal instrument to be used sparingly to facilitate the peace process and humanitarian mission. In contrast, NATO (under US pressure) wanted to use airpower to punish Bosnian Serb behavior and level the playing field

Also, the limits of this military power discussion must also consider the realities of chapter seven powers under the UN Charter and the additional force and resource requirements associated with peacemaking. In brief, chapter six allows the UN to mediate disputes between states and to provide recommended terms of settlement whereas chapter seven is more robust and (under Article 42) gives the UN Security Council the power to authorize the use of military force to "maintain or restore international peace and security."<sup>15</sup> However, because the "multilateral agreements for the provision of these UN forces have never been concluded (Article 43), UN enforcement operations have always been hastily improvised."<sup>16</sup> With this legal flaw in mind, the UN has labeled the collective security peacekeeping operations as "Chapter Six and a Half" to address its "tenuous legitimacy under the Charter."<sup>17</sup> In short, since the UN Security Council desired to protect the safe areas under provisions of chapter seven, the more realistic ground support package was required.

Moreover, given the constraints of airpower discussed earlier and the political problems of impartiality under chapter six, it was not feasible (both politically and militarily) to simply attempt to dictate the safe area policy from the air alone. While the UN attempted to deliver humanitarian aid under chapter six, NATO attempted to protect, deter, and enforce safe areas under chapter seven. Notwithstanding the compromises of Chapter Six and a Half, it is clear that the UN (with NATO's support) could not vacillate between the two provisions and still conduct its broader mission under the guise of neutrality. As a former senior UNPROFOR officer said, "Impartiality is a lot like virginity . . . once it is gone . . . it's gone."<sup>18</sup> In the final analysis, despite the claims that NATO airpower was used ineffectively, it is clear that the safe area plan could not be accomplished with the means given. Also, for all intents and purposes, for the first two years the UN did not enforce the safe areas because the Security Council and the troop contributing nations feared becoming embroiled as

co-belligerents.<sup>19</sup> Over time, once the Bosnian Serbs called the UN's bluff, the tangible costs of achieving the original safe areas objective (deterrence, protection, containment) became unacceptable. However, at the same time, the UN and NATO did not know how to declare policy failure and cut their losses.

Four, What were the alternatives to the safe area policy or what would have helped the stated policy? When the Serbs flagrantly violated the intent of the safe areas in the summer of 1995, the original safe area objectives were relegated behind the emerging objectives: that is salvaging institutional and political credibility of the key international actors. The overrun safe areas of Srebrenica and Zepa had the potential to set an unpalatable precedent for the UN, NATO, and the US if the action went unchecked. At this point the key international actors had to accept the tangential consequences (costs) not related to the original objective. The disproportionate bombing of the Bosnian Serbs in September had more to do with saving face than to protecting safe areas. The costs of this bombing became collectively acceptable to the UN, NATO, and the US. To the uninformed, it would seem that the disproportionate bombing vindicated the safe area policy. But realistically, it is more of a result of failed policy from the outset.

With this in mind, what were some of the other alternatives to this implemented safe area policy? First, the UN could have adopted the stated policy with the following modifications: unambiguously stated its political and military objectives with a clear exit strategy, selected the appropriate means (resources) to meet the stated objectives, and then to face the realities of the complicated situation in Bosnia and the nature of peace operations in this kind of environment.<sup>20</sup> Second, the UN could have aided the evacuation of the Muslims in the most threatened areas (e.g., Zepa and Srebrenica and most likely Gorazde) and thus genuinely have provided for their protection. Of course this does not take into consideration the political realities that confronted most western decisionmakers. These decisionmakers and the UN faced another core dilemma in the early stages of the war: if the UN evacuated the troubled pockets of Muslims, then it directly contributed to the ethnic partition of Bosnia (and assisted the Bosnian Serb strategy); on the other hand, if the UN did nothing or just set up safe areas, it was condemning tens of thousands of civilians to a slow death.<sup>21</sup>

When the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Conrelio Sommaruga was asked if he supported safe areas in November 1992, he said the priority in his view was to save lives, even if it meant "temporarily moving vulnerable groups out of their regions of origin."<sup>22</sup>

Five, how strong is the home front? This point is not as relevant to the issue as the other questions, but it does warrant some discussion. With little home support, both the Clinton and Bush administrations did not consider the Bosnian conflict as a matter of US vital interests.<sup>23</sup> Later, President Clinton refined his national security criteria for military intervention, and Bosnia was relegated to the lowest rung of the newly created "humanitarian interests."<sup>24</sup>

From the outset, it seems both the Europeans and Americans wanted to avoid at all costs becoming embroiled in a conflict that held very little interests to their respective publics at large. Because support on the home front was weak or ambivalent at best, the original humanitarian mandate was crafted to avoid chapter seven considerations. With the provisions of chapter six in mind, the Europeans were willing to deploy ground troops for limited humanitarian support. Knowing that the public opinion polls did not support US ground troops, Washington was unwilling to accept the risk to deploy peacekeepers until there was a peace to keep. For the American public, the memories of Mogadishu were fresh and few wanted to support yet another ill-fated humanitarian intervention that mirrored the debacle that led to the death of 19 soldiers in Mogadishu on 3 October 1993.

Six, does today's policy overlook points of difference and exaggerate points of likeness between the past and present? Under this question, Crowl warned policymakers and strategists to guard against the temptation to "fight the last war."<sup>25</sup> This forewarning would have paid big dividends to UN planners. Since safe areas are new to the lexicon of peace operations venacular, there was only one contemporary example of safe area operations on the shelf. As stated in chapters one and two, the UN borrowed the concept from safe havens set up to protect the Kurds of northern Iraq. One of the fundamental flaws of adopting the safe area policy from northern Iraq was the nature of the geography and political and military situation there in contrast to Bosnia. The safe havens in northern Iraq were "marked by a line on a flat plain enforceable by allied air forces and supportable by allied controlled lines of communication"<sup>26</sup> whereas the safe areas in Bosnia were isolated islands separated

by rugged terrain held by the Bosnian Serbs. This difference demonstrates a key point. Because the Bosnian Serbs controlled all lines of communications to and from the safe areas, the UN could not easily duplicate what was achieved in northern Iraq. If the UN opted to enforce the safe areas from the outset under a chapter seven scenario as the UN Security Council envisioned, then the UN's force requirements would have grown exponentially. Thousands of additional troops would have been needed to support the hundreds of kilometers of secure corridors to push the earmarked humanitarian aid to the safe areas. This was simply not a parallel the UN faced in northern Iraq in support of the Kurds.

In the end, there are many conclusions to draw from the safe area's impact on the war and the peace operation in Bosnia. It is undoubtedly clear that the safe area policy caused a fundamental change in the UN peace operation and the conduct of the war. And it is clear that the safe areas directly contributed to the stalemated nature of the war. Both the rise (April 1993) and fall (July 1995) of the Srebrenica safe area symbolized the length of the stalemate. As stated in this paper, the safe areas led to a host of unintended consequences. The more serious examples include: a significant undermining of European and US relations, eroded credibility of the UN and NATO, and they fostered a deadlocked diplomatic process (which led to a continuation of the war). Paradoxically, it seems clear that the safe area mandate resulted in two contradictory outcomes regarding whom they were supposed to protect. That is, on the one hand, the UN prolonged the agony of tens of thousands of civilians as a direct result of this safe area concept; on the other hand, the UN also saved the lives of tens of thousands of civilians under the safe area regime.

In hindsight, the UN could have spared the agony and saved thousands of lives if it had followed the recommendation of the ICRC in 1992. Again, the ICRC advocated that the movement of civilians from their troubled towns was a better alternative to the safe area concept. Those who called this a war of aggression, e.g., the Clinton Administration, said the transfer of civilians would assist the Bosnian Serb's designs of ethnic cleansing. Because the UN Security Council and key leaders in the West were unwilling to forcefully protect the safe areas from the ground, the ICRC option was the best course of action among the bad options left. As unpalatable as it may seem,

historically, "the most stable and lasting solution to ethnic and nationalist conflict has been ethnic cleansing and partition."<sup>27</sup>

As stated earlier in this paper, the instrument of safe areas was implemented to protect civilians from military operations. However, because fighting escalated around the safe areas and the war was prolonged as a direct result, the safe areas actually brought more hardship to these civilians. In addition, the safe area concept ultimately undermined the entire peace operation because it compromised the UN's neutrality under its chapter six mandate. Conversely, if not for the safe area concept, arguably Gorazde and Bihac would have fallen and both Tuzla and Sarajevo would have suffered more.

The safe area policy also contributed to significant changes in the warring factions' strategy and tactics. The Bosnian Government forces clearly understood that these safe areas provided tactical stepping stones for military operations to regain lost ground. The safe areas were converted into fully protected military bases of operations in the heart of Bosnian Serb territory. The Bosnian Government forces were given de facto air support and protection from traditional military culmination. In contrast, the Bosnian Serbs lost the initiative and were hamstrung by the lengthy exterior lines that were a direct outcome of trying to defend these six safe areas. Clearly, if not for the safe areas, the Bosnian Government would never have been given the breathing space it needed to train, equip, and field a respectable army.

The role of the United States and NATO cannot be underestimated. Both the US and NATO used the safe areas to project their policy initiatives in Bosnia. Because the US was unwilling to commit ground troops but at the same time wanted to be a key player in conflict resolution, the US eventually used NATO as a surrogate for its policy goals. At the same time, NATO understood that "out of area or out of business" was a wake up call for its very survival. Unfortunately for NATO, as history has proven, Bosnia is not the ideal place to stake out institutional credibility. As the Serbs ratcheted up pressure around the safe areas in response to Bosnian provocations, the US, NATO, and the UN all realized that peace would not be purchased lightly. When the Bosnian Serbs finally called their bluff and overran Srebrenica and Zepa, the US, UN, and NATO all came to the realization that

there was more at stake than the stated objective of protecting civilians around places that few in the West could properly pronounce. In essence, the credibility of world's strongest nations and institutions was at stake. If they failed in Bosnia, then they would set an unacceptable precedent for the post Cold War period.

The international community is still trying to find its bearing in the uncharted waters of the post-Cold War period. Ethnic and nationalist cleavages are the predominant source of war today, and the UN is increasingly being asked to provide stability to these types of conflicts. The post-Cold War period has not only led to a significant expansion in the demand for UN peace support operations, but it also has brought stark new realities to the world of peace support operations.<sup>28</sup> As Boutros Boutros Ghali has recognized, "the 1990s have given peacekeeping another new task: the protection of the delivery of humanitarian supplies to civilians caught up in a continuing conflict."<sup>29</sup> With the dramatic change in international security environment, it is clear that the UN will eventually confront other ethnic conflicts that parallel the tragedies of Bosnia. The corollary to this problems is that there will be calls for the establishment of safe areas in the future. Unfortunately for the UN, "ethnic warfare, unlike the Cold War or the Gulf War, is not deterred by the threat of strategic escalation."<sup>30</sup> That is, instruments like safe areas will be difficult to enforce with the realities of today's strategic environment in mind. Consequently, before the UN applies the safe area concept again, it must learn the hard lessons from Bosnia.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup>Dan Smith, "Just War, Clausewitz and Sarajevo," Journal of Peace Research, 31, no. 2, (May 1994): 136.

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<sup>4</sup>Stoltenberg, "Introducing Peacekeeping in Europe," International Peacekeeping, 2, (Summer 1995): 219.

<sup>5</sup>UN Document S/RSE/836 (1993), 4 June 1993, 2.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup>UN Document: Report to Secretary General Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 982, (May 1995): 8.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>10</sup>Dan Smith, 138.

<sup>11</sup>Crowl, 87.

<sup>12</sup>United States General Accounting Office, "Peace Operations Update on the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia," GOA/NSIAD-95-148BR, May 1995, 37.

<sup>13</sup>Orn, 6.

<sup>14</sup>Owen, 355.

<sup>15</sup>John F. Hillen, "UN Collective Security: Chapter Six and a Half," Parameters, XXIV, no. 1, (Spring 1994): 28.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>18</sup>Author's notes from a meeting with an UNPROFOR official.

<sup>19</sup>NATO Declares War on the Bosnian Serbs," The Economist, 2 September 1995, 41.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, 139.

<sup>21</sup>"The Search for a Safe Haven in the Kingdom of Death," The Economist, 21 November 1992, 59.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>23</sup>Woodward, 397.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 519.

<sup>25</sup>Smith, 142.

<sup>26</sup>Owen, 67.

<sup>27</sup>Benjamin Schwarz, "The Diversity Myth: America's Leading Export," The Atlantic Monthly, (May 1995): 65.

<sup>28</sup>Orn, 1.

<sup>29</sup>Boutros Boutros Ghali, "Empowering the United Nations," Foreign Affairs, 71, no. 5, (Winter 1992/93): 90.

<sup>30</sup>Kipp and Thomas, 31.



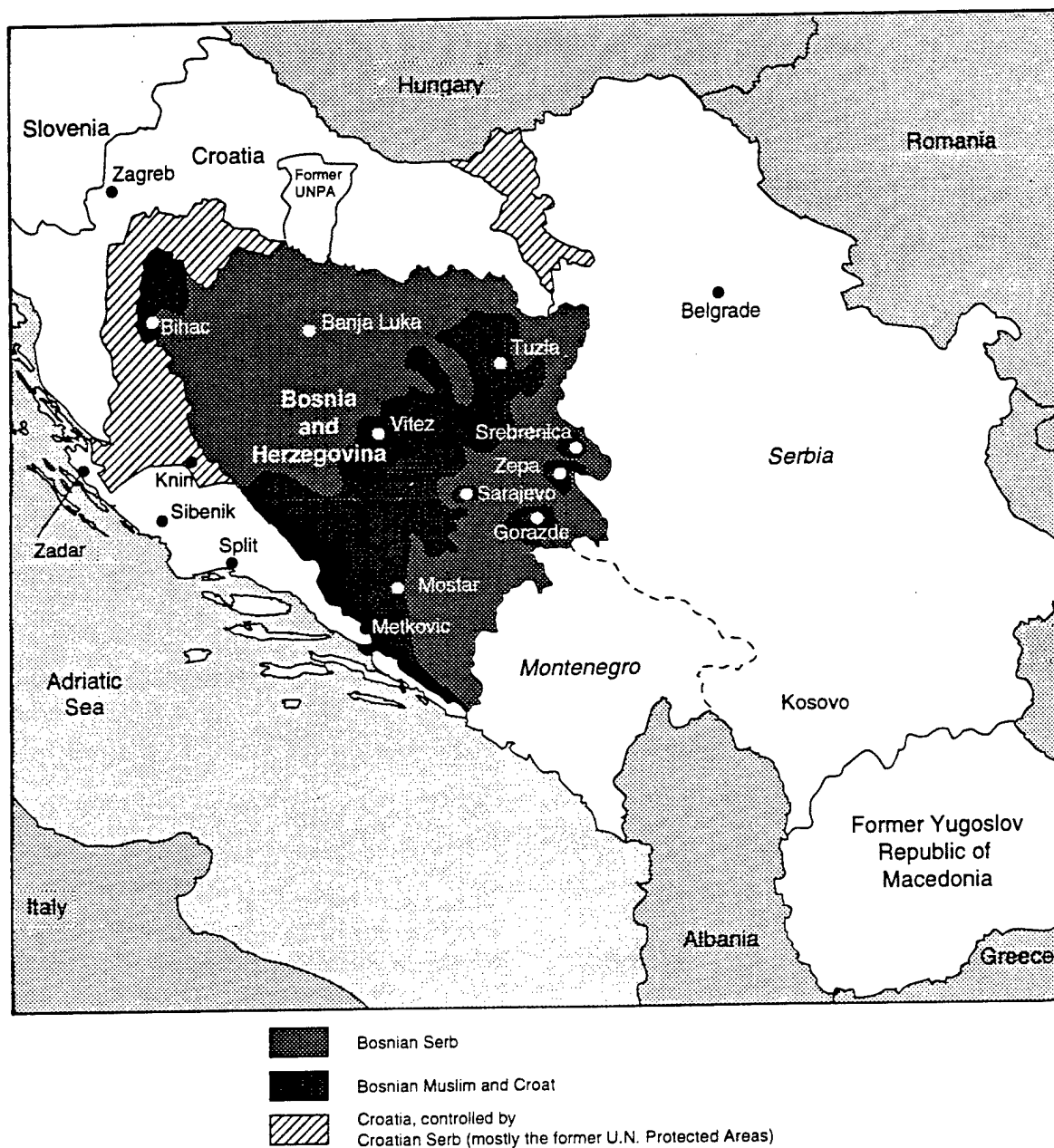


Figure. Map of Factional Control in the Former Yugoslavia. Map reproduced from GAO/ NSIAD-95-14BR Peace Operations, May 1995, 8.

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